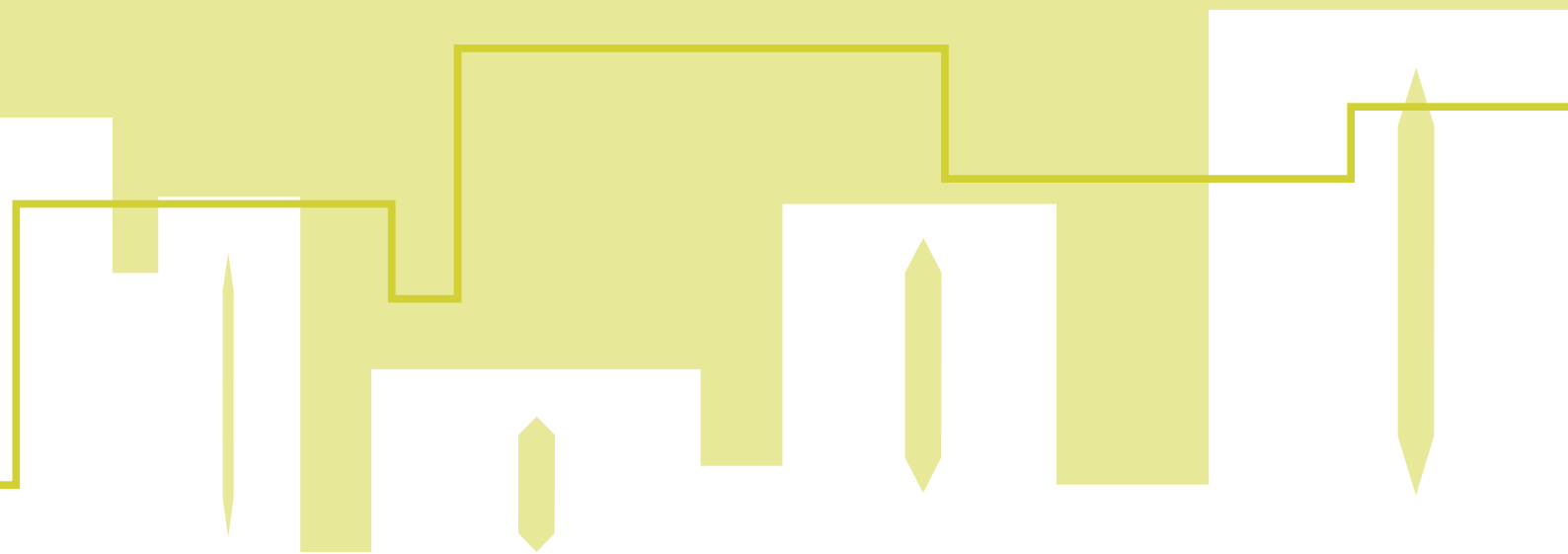


# Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales

May 2010



# **Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales**

**May 2010**

**Monitoring Report 5**

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#### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Authority is accordingly required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

#### **Contact us**

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: [authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk)

UK Statistics Authority  
Statistics House  
Myddelton Street  
London EC1R 1UW

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# Foreword

## **Sir Michael Scholar, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority**

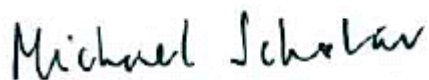
This report sets out the UK Statistics Authority's recommendations on steps to enhance public confidence in official crime statistics. Our recommendations, which are set out in Section 3 of the report, will now need to be considered by the new government in the context of the wider agenda to restore public confidence in government, politics and public services.

There are of course two main statistical sources on crime, the crime figures recorded by the police and the results of the British Crime Survey. Both have known weaknesses but these are mostly intrinsic and unavoidable. It is the job of professional statisticians in government to filter the signal from the noise and explain the results in a way that is trusted.

Having two different sources can undoubtedly cause confusion but the answer is not to change either of them fundamentally. The two sets of statistics throw different lights on the incidence and experience of crime and we need both of them. The challenge is to compile and communicate the information from these two sources in ways that are accepted as open and impartial. In looking at this long-standing problem, we have drawn on the conclusions of a number of earlier reviews in the field and built on responses to our interim report that was published in December 2009.

The preparation of this report has been overseen by a project board, chaired by Partha Dasgupta, who is a non-executive member of the Statistics Authority, and including leading criminologists and experts from central and local government.

I would like to thank all members of the project board and everyone who offered comments on the interim report. Thanks are also due to the many other people who have been generous with their time, contributing valuable experience and expertise. The conclusions and recommendations are those of the Authority.



May 2010

# 1. Summary

1. Most commentators would agree that measuring crime and reporting on the statistics are inherently difficult. The crime figures for England and Wales, for which the Home Office is responsible, have been subject to many improvements over the years and, in terms of technical quality, we believe they compare well with corresponding statistics for other countries.
2. Despite this, there continues to be public criticism of the statistics and mistrust in the way that they are used and quoted. As far as we can tell, this exceeds the level of criticism and mistrust in most other countries. Research and previous reviews have suggested that this mistrust is exacerbated by the nature of some media reporting of the statistics.
3. This may, in part, reflect wider mistrust of official information, not just statistics, but there are factors inherent to crime statistics that may also play a role:
  - the existence of two major data sources (police recorded crime figures and the British Crime Survey). Both sources are essential to create a full picture, but their different strengths and weaknesses lead, on occasions, to a degree of public and political confusion and present an opportunity for selective and misleading quotation and reporting
  - the difficulty of ensuring consistent recording practice across the 43 territorial police forces and the British Transport Police. The counting and classification of crime after it is reported to the police is a complex process; and changes to the rules and guidelines are necessary from time to time as problems emerge and are resolved, or in order to reflect changes in legislation. This is a proper part of a process of continuous updating and improvement, but it can also generate suspicion and confusion.
4. The wealth of statistical material available from the police, British Crime Survey (BCS) and other sources is both a strength and a challenge for the reporting of crime statistics. The annual bulletin published by the Home Office aims to be both timely and comprehensive, but it can be difficult to decipher clear messages from such a large volume of data, especially given the many types of criminal offence. Moreover, changes in police recording practice or BCS methodology, designed to improve accuracy, can in the short term introduce discontinuities and make it harder to explain trends.
5. Research shows that people tend to have a more informed view of local than national trends and are more confident about the way crime is being dealt with locally than nationally. Distrust often arises from the way that the statistics are used and quoted after they have been released, although research on public confidence in official statistics carried out between 2004 and 2009 also suggests that many people think that there is political interference in the production of statistics.

6. We believe that trust can be improved, at least in the longer term, by the following:

- a) new arrangements for overseeing the production and publication of crime statistics, in order to provide independent and public assurance of the impartiality and integrity of these statistics (recommendations 1 and 2)
- b) improvements in the way that the national (England and Wales) statistics are reported, by making them as relevant as possible to the needs of users and making it easier to understand the flow of offences and offenders through the criminal justice system (recommendations 3 and 4(i))
- c) improvements in the way that crime statistics are used and quoted both inside and outside government (recommendation 4(ii) and 4 (iii))
- d) more cooperation between all relevant agencies to ensure that local statistics on crime, and on the performance of the criminal justice system, are produced, analysed and presented to a high standard (recommendations 4(iv), 5 and 6).

Our recommendations are set out in full in section 3.

## 2. Conclusions

### Enhancing independence

7. Trust in the national crime statistics has been undermined by confusion and misuse (paragraphs 52-53, 102-3) and perhaps also by association with other types of information (paragraph 106). This makes it all the more important that they are not only independent from political interference, but seen to be independent.

8. There have been calls for the responsibility for crime statistics to be moved from the Home Office and given to another body such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (paragraph 152). The argument in favour is that the statistics would be distanced from the policy agenda of government. One argument against is that distrust of official statistics is rooted not so much in production arrangements as in the way that the statistics are published and then used. Transferring responsibility for the production of the statistics would not necessarily prevent misuse.

9. As far as police recorded crime statistics are concerned, there are some practical considerations that militate against transferring responsibility for their compilation from the Home Office to another agency. These figures come from administrative systems run by the police in support of their work. An awareness of what happens on the ground, in the police forces where records are created, is beneficial both in terms of understanding the data and in setting statistical requirements. This is challenging enough for statisticians in the Home Office, but could be still harder for a more remote organisation with no powers or budgetary control over the police. The Home Office has both the powers and ultimately the motivation to ensure that the recording of crime is as consistent as it can be made to be.

10. Transfer of responsibility for the British Crime Survey, on the other hand, would be feasible on a practical level. The fieldwork is currently undertaken by a commercial survey organisation and funding and responsibility for this contract could be transferred from the Home Office to ONS (as both are government departments) with minimal disruption. However, it is not clear how much this would achieve in terms of enhancing trust. In addition, the presence within the Home Office of statisticians with knowledge of and responsibility for recorded crime and BCS helps to ensure that the statistics are used effectively and with integrity within the department.

11. Moving the collection of either type of crime statistic from the Home Office to the ONS would be an expensive step to take, as the Home Office would need to retain statistical capability for its own purposes (for example, undertaking in-house analysis to inform policy development). This would result in duplication of effort. The statutory basis on which policing statistics are collected rests on the powers of the Home Secretary under the *Police Act 1996*, so the implications of this would also need to be considered.

12. We conclude that crime statistics should continue to be compiled and managed by the Home Office, but that there should be further enhancements to demonstrate independence. We have not seen any evidence that the current arrangements are subject to political interference, but perceptions are important. We therefore think that there is a case for oversight of the production of crime statistics to be given to a non-executive board, chaired by a trusted public figure (recommendation 1).

13. The proposed board would keep methods, contents of data collection instruments and arrangements for quality assurance under review, and provide independent assurance about the impartiality and integrity of the data. Its work would be transparent and public facing. Papers, correspondence and minutes would be placed promptly on its website, and the board would comment publicly on the issues within its remit. The methodological issues to be reviewed would include whether to develop alternative measures of crime (paragraphs 131–134) and the future development of the BCS.

14. We note that the majority of the Crime and Justice Statistics User Network favours keeping oversight of the BCS with the Home Office (annex J) but that there are dissenting voices who would welcome a detailed analysis of the case (including financial costs and benefits) for moving it elsewhere. This is also something that the new non-executive board might wish to consider.

## Reviewing the statistical outputs

### (i) Focusing on uses

15. The current annual bulletin is based on a range of the best available sources of crime data. This is a step forward from the presentation of each source separately. However, the media and public do not always recognise the rationale for the choices that the authors have to make between sources (police data or BCS for example) when describing particular types of crime. The bulletin is also a ‘one size fits all’ publication that has to meet a range of possible uses, for example:

- understanding the risks of victimisation and what is driving trends
- monitoring the performance of the criminal justice system
- debating policy and operational issues (e.g. criminal justice, crime prevention, policing)
- determining operational priorities and allocating resources.

16. One option might therefore be to replace the existing bulletin with a series of commentaries based around the principal *uses* of the statistics – so that, for example, one report might be produced on how and why crime is changing; a second might examine statistics relevant to the performance of the police and the rest of the criminal justice system; while a third might look at who is at risk from crime, and why. Each report would reproduce relevant parts of the statistical data rather than trying to provide an overview of the whole.

17. Such approaches would require more choices and judgements to be made in writing a narrative. There would need to be a clear, professional and objective commentary, firmly evidence-based and written by people with statistical and criminological expertise who could command the confidence of journalists and the public. The needs of the media and the public – in terms of which messages from the statistics are most relevant – are not necessarily the same as those of policy makers, practitioners in the criminal justice system or professional researchers. Further judgements would be needed about how to address these distinctions.

18. The choices and judgements required could, of themselves, attract questions about impartiality and accusations of political motivation, particularly if the statistical work continued to be undertaken within the Home Office. Arguably it would be better to publish such commentaries separately, but alongside, the statistics. The regular data releases would provide a standard set of figures in a format that was as consistent as possible from one year to the next. The commentaries would draw on the statistics to highlight the main trends and to provide insights as to the most likely explanations. They might also offer independent advice about when *not* to place too much reliance on a single finding or an apparent change, pending the availability of more evidence.

19. The added focus on uses would help to make the data more relevant to the media and public, improve understanding, and promote confidence. It would be in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which requires producers to: ‘provide factual information about the policy or operational context’ and ‘provide information on the quality and reliability of statistics in relation to the range of potential uses’. It would also be in line with findings from the Authority’s interim report on strengthening user engagement<sup>1</sup>. This recommends that statistical heads of profession in government should work with experts in the subjects to which the statistics relate, to find ways to explain more clearly in statistical releases the relevance and meaning of the figures. We think that a move in this direction could make a real difference to the way in which the statistics are perceived.

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<sup>1</sup> *Strengthening User Engagement, Interim Report*, UK Statistics Authority, March 2010  
[www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html)

20. While the Home Office would remain free to publish ad hoc analyses and research based on recorded crime, BCS or other sources, we think regular commentaries should be published by the National Statistician (recommendation 2). These would establish a benchmark for independent interpretation and inform further analysis of the statistics. In producing such commentaries, the National Statistician would decide whether to work with statisticians and criminologists in government, and/or external experts.

21. Any new approach to commentary on the statistics would need to be introduced after suitable consultation and be closely monitored to assess public and media reaction (recommendation 3). The National Statistician would need to seek wide agreement to changes in presentation and content, such as the commissioning of one or more independent commentaries. To facilitate this, we think it would be helpful to produce and use an agreed conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice statistics, along the lines suggested in paragraph 26.

22. A more targeted approach to statistical commentary would need to be balanced by enhancing access to the underlying statistical data so that anyone interested could investigate further and make different judgements if they wished. It would remain essential that comprehensive statistics from each source continue to be available, and actively developed and disseminated. In this context, it would be useful if non-expert users could be given improved access to BCS data (for example, via a facility to build tables on the Home Office website), together with guidance on the need to consider sampling variability when interpreting patterns or trends<sup>2</sup>. This would complement the work that has been done to make national recorded crime figures more accessible.

## **(ii) Joining up crime and criminal justice**

23. As far as the reader is concerned, there is little evident linkage between statistics from the Home Office on crime and those from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on criminal justice. Publication of separate volumes makes it hard to find an answer to simple questions (albeit deceptively simple in some cases) about the proportion of crimes that have been brought to justice or the form of sanction that has been applied. There are plans to provide more information – especially at a local level – but the large number of agencies and websites currently involved does not tend to promote a joined-up approach (paragraph 181).

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<sup>2</sup> In common with other government household surveys, BCS datasets are available to researchers via the UK Data Archive.

24. At the England and Wales level, we think that the number and range of publications on the criminal justice system (which mostly deal with the treatment of offenders) should be reviewed, with the aim of making them more usable by the non-expert. For example, selected offence groups might become the subject of a specially commissioned commentaries, each covering trends in crime, detection rates, offences brought to justice, penalties, sentences (handed down and actually completed) and re-offending. This would provide an overview across the criminal justice system.

25. Such an approach would have to be based initially on cross-sectional data, as longitudinal analysis (which would follow a 'cohort' of offences or offenders) is still a longer term goal<sup>3</sup>. We hope that MoJ will continue to work on the development of linked data systems to ensure that progress through the criminal justice system can be modelled effectively in the future.

26. It would be helpful to have a high level framework showing flows through the criminal justice system, how the available figures fit together, and where gaps, discrepancies or discontinuities occur (recommendation 4(i)). This would make it easier to see the extent to which the various stages and processes in the system are covered by the existing data.

### **(iii) The international context**

27. There may also be a case for reporting crime trends in a more international context. International comparisons require great care – measures of 'total' recorded crime, for example, are not comparable due to differences in legislation and recording practice across national boundaries. Nevertheless, it may be possible to increase public and media confidence in some findings (for example whether crime in England and Wales is stable or falling) if it can be pointed out that similar trends have been observed elsewhere. This particularly applies to findings from regular victimisation surveys.

## **Using and quoting the statistics responsibly**

28. We think that a public 'protocol' on the responsible use of crime statistics, as suggested in the Casey Review (paragraph 105) would be difficult to enforce and its interpretation would be problematic, particularly in relation to the dividing line between what is acceptable statistical usage in the cut and thrust of political debate and what constitutes an outright misuse of statistics.

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<sup>3</sup> The current exception to this is homicide. The Home Office is able to publish statistics on the outcome of offences initially recorded as homicides, together with data on suspects and victims. See Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/10: *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2008/09*, January 2010.

29. We do, however, think that it would be helpful to have a free-standing guide that explains the strengths and limitations of different kinds of crime data (paragraph 144) – providing independent, authoritative advice as to when it is appropriate to use recorded crime, BCS or another source and explaining the kinds of judgement that need to be made when no single source is ideal (recommendation 4(ii)). This would help to avoid the misuse of statistics (whether deliberate or inadvertent) in public statements while not impeding genuine research.

30. A guide to the data sources, as described, might be further developed into guidelines on the responsible use of crime statistics within government, which others might also choose to follow (recommendation 4(iii)). Its scope could also be extended to cover criminal justice statistics, and its guidance to include advice on the availability of publications and downloadable data, since the statistics concerned are currently spread across a range of websites.

## Local crime data

31. Several government and police websites now provide local crime figures, but they cover different categories of crime, for different time periods and for different geographies. The amount and quality of explanatory material is variable.

32. While supporting the public's right to have ready access to local information, we do have some concerns about the practical impact. There is a risk, for example, that fluctuations from one month to the next will be misinterpreted, possibly misleading the public or affecting the deployment of police resource. The data also need to be contextualised, since the level of recorded crime can be a reflection of operational decisions. Mistaken or ill-informed use of the statistics could reduce the level of trust in local information.

33. We would encourage the identification and implementation of shared good practice (paragraphs 146, 176-180, 184 and recommendation 5(i)). In particular, the Home Office is working with the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to strengthen existing guidance and support to the police on the conduct of local surveys. We would like to see this guidance include more advice on the analysis of results and their presentation to the public (recommendation 5(ii)).

## Performance related data

34. The previous government introduced a single national performance target for the police (public confidence in the police and local council – paragraph 166). This is being measured by the BCS. Data on a much wider range of performance measures continue to be collected and some of these are used to set targets at a local level. The Department for Communities and Local Government's Place Survey is used to measure some targets for Local Area Agreements, while locally conducted surveys may be used to measure performance against targets that are set locally for individual police forces or crime and disorder reduction partnerships.

35. Improved confidence in the police or criminal justice system, as measured in surveys, is a good outcome in its own right. It may indicate that the police and other local agencies are dealing with the anti social behaviour and crime issues that matter in the local area. In the long run, however, these are unlikely to be seen by the public as a substitute for other performance measures, such as reducing crime or ensuring that offenders are brought to justice. It is therefore important that the public has full access to other measures of performance, both locally and nationally, and to advice about the factors that may need to be taken into account in order to reach a rounded judgement. The HMIC *MyPolice* website is a major step in this direction, and the Ministry of Justice has said that it will provide more information on local outcomes in the criminal justice system and on the performance of criminal justice agencies.

36. Independent and expert commentary on the statistics is especially important in relation to performance measures. This applies at both a national and local level. In addition to full and detailed 'metadata', we think that the public should be provided with independent advice about the validity of each indicator as a measure of performance (paragraph 184 and recommendation 4(iv)).

## Quality of recorded crime data

37. At the national level, police records have an important role to play in monitoring some of the more serious (and infrequent) forms of crime. At a local level they are used by the police themselves and by partner agencies to determine priorities and to allocate resources. The national crime mapping website encourages the public to use the figures as a basis for dialogue with the police about priorities and performance, and there are other potential uses for the public, such as assessing risk.

38. Although much of the evidence is anecdotal, a number of interviewees told us that crime recording can be distorted by the existence of performance targets. There seems to be broad agreement that inspections by the Audit Commission over several years contributed to improvements in police crime recording, but these inspections have now ceased. The quality and consistency of the data derived from police records is even more important now that crime maps and local statistics are becoming widely available. We think that the current arrangements to ensure consistent application of the counting rules and to validate and check the resulting data should be published and reviewed, and a cost-effective way found of re-introducing some form of independent and risk-based audit – for example, though the use of unannounced spot checks (recommendation 6).

## Financial implications

39. We believe that the implementation of our recommendations would not require a major outlay of public expenditure. The most costly single item would be the re-introduction of external audit checks on police crime records, as previously carried out by the Audit Commission (paragraphs 78-79), but these costs could be reduced by adopting a periodic and risk-based approach. A cost of perhaps £1 million a year (plus costs to the police in responding to audits) needs to be considered in the context of total public expenditure on police services in England and Wales, which is of the order of £13-14 billion<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Public Expenditure: Statistical Analyses 2009, C, 7630, HM Treasury, June 2009*

## 3. Recommendations

40. The recommendations made in our interim report (annex H) have been reviewed in the light of comments received (annexes I and J). After consideration of the full range of evidence that has now been gathered, our final recommendations are as follows:

1. The Home Office should establish a standing non-executive board to review and report on arrangements for the production of crime statistics, in order to provide independent assurance of their impartiality and integrity, and to comment on methods and quality.
2. The National Statistician should publish a full and regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This would set an authoritative benchmark for further analysis of these data.
3. The National Statistician, in conjunction with relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should draw up proposals for the development of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system in England and Wales, and consult users inside and outside government. The aims should be to:
  - i) make the publications as relevant as possible to the likely uses of the statistics
  - ii) make it easier for the non-expert to understand the flow of offences and offenders through the criminal justice system.
4. The National Statistician, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should produce the following:
  - i) a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data, showing flows through the system, where and how data are captured, and where gaps, discrepancies or discontinuities occur
  - ii) a free-standing guide that explains the strengths and limitations of different types of crime data, the circumstances in which it would be appropriate to use one source rather than another, and the kinds of judgement that need to be made when no single source is ideal
  - iii) guidelines on the presentation and use of crime and criminal justice statistics in government documents and statements
  - iv) advice for the public about the interpretation of performance measures in the criminal justice system. This advice should be made available on all government websites where such data are displayed.

5. The Home Office, in conjunction with the NPIA, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Ministry of Justice and other relevant parties, should:
  - i) review the local data on crime and criminal justice that are becoming available across a variety of government websites and consider whether there are opportunities to consolidate, share best practice, and provide more comprehensive and consistent metadata (for example, definitions, explanations of how the data are derived, and discussion of strengths and limitations)
  - ii) supplement existing guidelines on the conduct of local surveys with good practice advice on the analysis, presentation and communication of results to the public.
6. The Home Office should publish a description of the steps currently taken (i) to ensure that police crime records result from the consistent application of the Counting Rules and (ii) to quality assure the statistics deriving from those records. It should supplement the steps in (i) as necessary, for example by spot checks or periodic external audit, in order to provide public reassurance of consistency.

## 4. Background to the report

*The overarching purpose for the collection of information on crime should be both to make governments accountable and to reduce the impact of crime on society.*

**Simmons review, July 2000**

*The Home Secretary is concerned that public trust in crime statistics produced by the Home Office has declined to such an extent that it is no longer possible to have a debate about alternative criminal justice policies on the basis of agreed facts about trends in crime.*

**Terms of reference for Smith review, November 2006**

*To produce a report on crime statistics is to travel a crowded road ...*

**Statistics Commission, September 2006**

41. According to the British Crime Survey (BCS), crime in England and Wales is currently relatively stable, after a period in the late 1990s and early 2000s in which it fell. Similar trends have been noted in other countries. Surveys of public perceptions, in contrast, show that many people believe crime to be increasing and that people often say they do not trust official statistics (paragraphs 94-95 and annex G).

42. The aim of the current review has been to:

- identify the barriers to trust in crime statistics
- examine the steps already taken to overcome those barriers and
- make recommendations as appropriate.

43. This builds directly on earlier reviews of crime statistics (see below). The work has been overseen by a project board including experts from central and local government and academia (annex A).

44. This final report follows an interim report published in December 2009<sup>5</sup>. It is based largely on desk research (using publicly available material) and on face to face or telephone interviews with government statisticians, senior policy and communications staff, police representatives, academics and journalists (annex B). In finalising our conclusions and recommendations, we have taken account of the views expressed at an open meeting in January 2010 (annex I) and of written responses to the interim report (annex J).

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html>

45. Although focused primarily on statistics relating to crime rather than criminal justice, the review considers a wider range of statistics where these appear to be linked to public trust and perceptions of the crime statistics. References in this report to statistics produced by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), for example, therefore reflect particular issues that were raised during interviews and research. We have not set out in this review to look at criminal justice statistics in their own right. There is, however, a list of the main statistical series relating to crime and criminal justice statistics at annex C.

46. In keeping with the previous reviews, this report is mainly concerned with statistics for England and Wales. However, statisticians in Scotland and Northern Ireland were contacted in order to see if there were any parallels with the experience of those two devolved administrations.

## Earlier reviews of crime statistics

47. In the last ten years there have been three reviews of crime statistics, and a review of crime, justice and community involvement which also drew attention to the lack of public trust in the statistics<sup>6</sup>. Two of these reviews were commissioned by the Home Office, one by the former Statistics Commission, and the wider review of community involvement was commissioned by the Prime Minister. Some of the findings and recommendations from these reviews are summarised in annex D.

48. If distrust of the statistics has been one recurring theme, then another is the very real difficulties that surround the definition and measurement of crime. It is worth noting, however, that these earlier reviews did not raise concerns about the integrity<sup>7</sup> of the way in which the Home Office goes about the business of data collection. They did, nonetheless, call for a greater degree of separation between staff involved in the production and dissemination of statistics and those responsible for policy-making. Two of the more recent reviews went so far as to suggest that responsibility for some or all of the statistics should be transferred to another body.

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<sup>6</sup> For references to these reviews, see annex D.

<sup>7</sup> The Code of Practice for Official Statistics refers to integrity as follows: *At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.* The Statistics Authority has yet to carry out a formal assessment of the England and Wales crime statistics against the Code of Practice, but there is nothing in the evidence gathered to date for this review to suggest that there is any lack of professional integrity.

## Responses to the previous reviews

49. Many of the recommendations from the earlier reviews have been implemented. Some of the major developments are summarised below.

### Improving the coverage of crime statistics

- The British Crime Survey has been extended to include children aged 10-15 (first results due in June 2010) but will not be extended to people living in communal establishments. Methodological research indicated that this could not be done in a statistically reliable manner without incurring very substantial costs.
- Following a scoping exercise<sup>8</sup>, the Home Office has announced its intention to proceed with a commercial victimisation survey in 2010/11, concentrating on the retail sector. This will be evaluated before embarking on surveys of other business sectors (previous surveys of commercial victimisation were carried out in 1994 and 2002).
- Data from the finance industry are being used to provide better information on fraud<sup>9</sup>.
- There have been some modifications to crime categories and offence labels, to make them more readily understandable. It has been decided that assault without injury (formerly common assault) should remain in the violence against the person category, along with other less serious offences such as harassment.

### Publication of Home Office statistics

- After inviting comment in the 2006/07 annual crime bulletin, the Home Office concluded there was little support for a weighted index of crime (paragraphs 131-134 and box D). There was more support for a basket of serious crime to indicate trends and the Home Office experimented with this in the 2007/08 bulletin.
- The Smith Review recommended that the Home Office should make the full monthly crime data available on its website, un-audited and without commentary. The Home Office has responded to this by working with the police and the NPIA to ensure that monthly figures are published by the police (see below).

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<sup>8</sup> *Business Crime Scoping Exercise*, Home Office Research Report 33, March 2010

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Fraud Indicator*, National Fraud Authority, January 2010

- There is now an independent press briefing for the publication of the annual Home Office crime statistics. This is held off-site and chaired by the National Statistician. Ministers are not present.

### **Police recording of crime**

- Periodic independent audits have not continued as recommended by Smith. However, following the discovery of inconsistencies in the way the police were recording grievous bodily harm with intent, HMIC has recently reviewed the recording of most serious violence (paragraphs 64-66).

### **Improving the provision of local data**

- In response to calls in the more recent reviews, all 43 territorial police forces are now providing on-line crime maps, with monthly data for overall and selected types of crime at a neighbourhood level. Because of data protection and disclosure concerns, these maps are usually colour coded and do not show the location of individual crimes, as is the practice in parts of the United States.
- The NPIA has launched a website that makes it possible to access these maps and data from a single location (<http://maps.police.uk/>)
- Interactive crime maps of annual recorded crime data at local authority level are available on the Home Office website, where it is also possible to obtain tabular downloads.
- A Green Paper in 2009<sup>10</sup> stated that general information on criminal justice outcomes and overall performance would be available online by the end of that year, and would be linked to crime mapping. Where possible, some information on offences brought to justice and sentencing would be provided at a more local level than the 42 criminal justice board areas.

### **Improving independence and governance**

- The Home Office established a Surveys, Design and Statistics Subcommittee to advise on matters relating to the use and production of statistics and on the design of surveys such as BCS.
- All statistical staff in the Home Office now report to a chief statistician and sit in the Home Office Statistics Unit, rather than being embedded in policy units. The chief statistician reports on professional matters to the National Statistician.

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<sup>10</sup> *Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice*, Cm 7583, The Stationery Office, April 2009

- The Smith Review was against moving responsibility for the compilation of crime statistics from the Home Office, recommending instead a number of improvements to the existing arrangements (such as those outlined above). The Statistics Commission, however, recommended that consideration be given to moving responsibility for the BCS from the Home Office to the ONS. The Casey Review went further than this, proposing that responsibility for the production of crime statistics be moved to an independent organisation. The Home Office has implemented the Smith recommendations.

## 5. Measuring crime

*Well the thing is they've got two figures that they measure crime by and one's the British Crime Survey and one's the, I think it's the actual figures that are recorded by the police. And they keep changing which one they're highlighting depending on which one's the best and so the police one is actually a much lower figure than the British Crime Survey, although the British Crime Survey's gone down a lot so they're highlighting that.*

**Participant in MORI focus group<sup>11</sup>**

*There is great value in having two complementary but nonidentical systems ... addressing the same phenomenon, for the basic reason that crime and victimisation are topics that are too broad to be captured neatly by one measure. The police are not a disinterested party when it comes to characterising the crime problem, and it is unwise to have data generated by the police as a sole measure of crime nationally ... Moreover, it is clear that a substantial proportion of crime is not reported fully and completely to law enforcement authorities. Thus, there remains a vital role for a survey-based measure that sheds light on unreported crime.*

**Review of justice statistics in the United States<sup>12</sup>**

50. The Home Office has been publishing statistics on crime for over 150 years. Until the 1980s it was largely reliant on police figures and in many other countries this is still the case. However, police figures have known limitations. Much crime is never reported to the police in the first place and the discovery of some types of crime is a result of operational decisions. Statistics derived from police records are a measure of police activity and are often used to gain an understanding of the performance of the police and partner agencies, and to target the use of resources, but they are not necessarily a good measure of crime.

51. Since the early 1980s police statistics have been supplemented by data from the British Crime Survey<sup>13</sup> which asks a representative sample of the household population about their experiences of crime over the year prior to interview. As with any victimisation survey, the BCS also has its limitations, but it is generally accepted as a more reliable measure of trends in the common types of crime against individuals or households. The two sources are compared in table 1.

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Closing the Gaps: Crime and Public Perceptions*, Bobby Duffy et al, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, 2007

<sup>12</sup> *Ensuring the Quality, Credibility and Relevance of U.S. Justice Statistics*, National Academies Press, 2009

<sup>13</sup> The BCS actually covers England and Wales. There are separate surveys in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

52. The existence of two sources of crime statistics is undoubtedly one factor that contributes to distrust, as was acknowledged by interviewees inside and outside the Home Office. For statisticians and criminologists, the two types of data complement one another: the absence of either source would lead to huge gaps in our knowledge about crime.

**Table 1: Recorded crime and BCS compared**

	Recorded crime	British Crime Survey
Where do the data come from?	Administrative police records	Face to face interviews with residents from a nationally representative sample of the household population
Basis for inclusion	Notifiable offence list and Home Office Counting Rules, governed by the National Crime Recording Standard	Specially trained coders determine whether experiences of victimisation in the 12 months prior to interview constitute a crime, and assign an offence code
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides data at a local level (and can therefore be used for performance monitoring)</li> <li>• Can be a good measure of rarer, more serious types of crime (e.g. robbery)</li> <li>• Could, potentially, be linked with data from other agencies in the Criminal Justice System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good measure of long term trends in the more common types of crime against persons or households</li> <li>• Captures information about crimes that are not reported to the police (including sensitive issues such as domestic abuse or drug misuse<sup>14</sup>)</li> <li>• Provides information on multiple and repeat victimisation (up to 5 incidents in a series)</li> <li>• Possible to analyse risk for different demographic groups; and to examine victim-offender associations etc</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> Information on some more sensitive topics is collected via computer-assisted self-interviewing (in which respondents view questions on a computer screen and enter the answers themselves).

<p>Limitations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many crimes are not reported to the police so overall crime is significantly underestimated</li> <li>• Reporting rates vary by type of crime, so the overall picture is skewed (in general terms low level crime is less likely to be reported than serious crime)</li> <li>• Trend data can be affected by changes in any of the following: legislation; the level of reporting to the police; recording practice; counting rules; operational decisions (e.g. more pro-active policing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not cover homicide; commercial crime; 'victimless' crimes and crimes where people are not aware they have been victimised; or crimes against people who are homeless or living in communal accommodation</li> <li>• Crimes against under 16s have not been included to date, although this is about to change (paragraph 49)</li> <li>• Difficult to measure geographical variation or trends in the rarer forms of crime (which tend to be more serious offences)</li> </ul>
<p>What other data are collected?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional data on homicides, gun crime and knife crime</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public perceptions about crime and anti social behaviour</li> <li>• Worry about crime and the perceived likelihood of being victimised</li> <li>• Confidence in the police and criminal justice system</li> <li>• Prevalence estimates on the misuse of illicit drugs</li> </ul>

53. For the media, the public and many politicians, however, the two sources often seem to compete for attention. The above remarks from a focus group participant illustrate how easy it is for the impression of cherry-picking to take hold. This is a particular problem when the two sources of data show contradictory trends, as happened, for example, when police recorded crime increased as result of changes in the 'Counting Rules' and the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (box A on page 24). In these circumstances it is not unknown for the BCS to be described as a 'public opinion poll'<sup>15</sup>. The advice of Home Office statisticians about which source is the more reliable for particular purposes may be treated with suspicion or ignored altogether.

<sup>15</sup> For example: *Watch out: the crime stats are sent to scare us*, Times Online, 18/07/03

## The British Crime Survey

54. The Casey Review commented that very few members of the public understand that the BCS is designed to overcome problems of under-reporting. It went on to argue that the conflicting trends between BCS and recorded crime presented a confusing picture to the media and public:

*While the intention to present BCS and recorded crime as a complementary series greater than the sum of its parts is valid for policy and operational purposes, as information to the public, either directly or through the media, the combined information is arguably of limited value.*

55. The argument for continuing to publish the two sources of data together was made earlier by the Smith Review:

*... the Home Office has a duty to try to report to the best of its ability what it believes to be the levels of and trends in criminal activity. There will always be multiple sources of – potentially conflicting – information on which to base such a report. If there are conflicting messages, we do not believe that simply publishing the different sources separately without acknowledging and addressing such conflicts in the data would be a helpful contribution to public understanding.*

56. While retaining its original objective of measuring victimisation in the household population, the BCS has changed over the years. Since 2001 the fieldwork has been conducted continuously, with results produced on an annual basis. Over time, more questions have been added on attitudes to crime and the criminal justice system, and on topics such as drug misuse and domestic abuse. The sample has been increased in order to provide data at the level of individual police force areas.

57. The Home Office has commissioned a review of BCS sampling in order to determine whether changes in the sampling methodology have affected the reliability of trend estimates. The review is also looking at whether non-response to the survey from young people in high crime areas is causing their level of victimisation to be underestimated, and at the effect of changing to a rolling reference period (that is, interviewees are asked to recall their experience of crime over the 12 months prior to their survey interview).

58. As noted earlier (paragraph 49) steps have been taken to extend the coverage of the BCS, and there are separate initiatives to obtain more information on fraud and on commercial victimisation.

## Police recorded crime

59. Each police force in England and Wales submits a monthly aggregate return to the Home Office, on a form known as CRIMSEC3. It can be seen from the specimen form at annex E that the amount of information provided to the Home Office is quite limited. There are no data, for example, on the characteristics of victims or suspects, or the circumstances of the offence<sup>16</sup>. This is about to change: during 2010/11 there are plans for the Home Office to receive record-level extracts from the data collected by the police. This will open up wider opportunities for research into patterns of crime.

60. The initial recording of crime is inherently complex and it is difficult to achieve consistency within and between 43 police forces<sup>17</sup>. There is scope both for genuine misunderstanding and for the adoption of practices that may reflect better in the performance indicators. As differences in interpretation have come to light, so the Counting Rules have been tightened and clarified. In addition, changes in criminal law often require the rules to be updated.

61. Fairly extensive changes in 1998 and again after the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) caused discontinuities in the recorded crime statistics. In the case of the 1998 revisions, a period of double counting made it possible to separate out the effects of the changes.

62. The NCRS, although formally implemented in April 2002, was introduced by some forces a year earlier. It then took some time for it to be fully adopted across every force. This made it harder to disentangle the effects of the new standard from real trends in crime<sup>18</sup>. For a period following the introduction of the standard, BCS crime was declining and (as might be expected) police recorded crime increased. The end result was a degree of confusion and suspicion in the media that persists to this day (as was confirmed by interviewees for this review). The Smith Review commented that such changes to statistical series should be better managed.

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16 Additional information is provided for a few types of offence, such as homicides and firearm offences.

17 In addition to the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, the Home Office Counting rules have been adopted by the British Transport Police and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. BTP data for England and Wales are included in the published statistics. Northern Ireland data are published separately.

18 An initial estimate of the impact of the changes was published in 2003: see *National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS): an analysis of the impact on recorded crime*, Home Office, July 2003.

### **Box A: Counting Rules and Recording Standards**

Home Office Counting Rules spell out whether, how and when to record a crime. They are needed because many crime-related incidents do not involve a single offender committing a single offence against a single victim at one point in time. The Rules also cover the recording of detections.

The main guiding principles are 'one crime per victim' and 'no victim no crime'. If more than one type of crime is committed in the course of an incident involving the same victim and offender, then only the most serious crime is counted.

All incidents reported to the police are registered – whether the report comes from victims, witnesses or third parties, and whether or not it relates to a crime. The *National Crime Recording Standard* introduced a more victim-focused system for recording crime. It stipulates that an incident will be recorded as a crime if, on the balance of probability, the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law and there is no credible evidence to the contrary. This means that in most cases a belief by the victim that a crime has occurred is sufficient to justify it being recorded as a crime. Once recorded, a crime remains recorded unless there is additional verifiable information to disprove that a crime occurred. This was a significant departure from the process prior to April 2002 when the criteria for recording a crime were far less clear and were influenced by local police culture.

For offences against the state, where there is no specific intended victim, the evidence that an offence has taken place must be made out before a crime is recorded.

The layout of the Counting Rules for a sample offence (going equipped for stealing etc) is shown at annex F. For each offence one or more pages deal with the classification of the offence (including the legal definition) followed by one or more pages describing how the counting rules should be applied. Together with the general rules, they run to over 500 pages.

63. The Home Office has also made changes to the way it classifies offences. This has been done with good intentions – for example, in order to achieve a more commonsense classification that the public would recognise – and in response to earlier reviews of crime statistics. The classification and presentation of statistics on violent crime has been a particular problem of late. This is partly because of confusion about the Counting Rules – in particular, misunderstandings about how to classify offences where there is clear intent to commit grievous bodily harm, but which do not result in that degree of injury.

## Most serious violence

64. Inconsistencies in police recording of GBH with intent came to light in 2007, causing the Home Office to issue a clarification of the Counting Rules in early 2008. This in turn led to an increase in the number of 'most serious violence' offences recorded by the police, provoking media and political comment<sup>19</sup>. Although the inconsistencies did not affect the overall figures for violence against the person, this episode has hampered attempts to monitor trends in 'most serious violence'<sup>20</sup> and there can be little doubt that it has helped to undermine trust in the statistics.

65. HMIC has recently completed a quality review<sup>21</sup> of the way in which police forces record most serious violence. This looked at error rates in three areas:

- the initial decision as to whether an incident should be treated as violent crime
- the decision as to whether to classify violent crimes as most serious violence or as assault with less serious injury
- 'no criming' – the subsequent decision to remove a violent incident from the crime record because the police formed a view that no crime had taken place after all.

66. The HMIC report noted the variation in these error rates between different forces and suggested that possible sources of error included changes and clarifications in the Counting Rules and the lack of independent monitoring of crime records. With reference to the Counting Rules, however, the report pointed out that there was nothing in recent clarifications that would affect 'no crime' decisions, and if changes in the Rules were a source of confusion, it would be necessary to explain why some forces were apparently less confused by the changes than others.

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19 The UK Statistics Authority issued a statement on 29 October 2008 saying that the lessons to be learned from the process underlying changes to recording practices and associated media comment would be considered for this review: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/news-2008/index.html>

20 The Home Office PSA target on violence has now been modified to cover all violence against the person with injury – including section 47 ABH and more serious offences. The previous PSA target covered section 20 GBH and more serious offences. This has ensured a stable data set for following trends. Section references are to the *Offences against the Person Act, 1861*.

21 *Crime Counts: A Review of Data Quality For Offences of the Most Serious Violence*, HMIC, October 2009

## 'Size and complexity'

67. Several interviewees for this review drew attention to the complexity of the rules for counting and classifying crime and to the size of the notifiable list (box B). These were felt to be barriers to communication in themselves and to exaggerate the overall crime figures (compared to some other countries) by including a large number of low level offences. The sheer number and complexity of offences was described as 'bewildering', going beyond what was needed for presentation in the national statistics and for accountability to the public.

### **Box B: Notifiable offences**

'Recorded crime' consists of those offences that have to be notified to the Home Office. This covers all indictable and triable-either-way offences (that is, offences that can *only* be tried at the Crown Court and offences that *may* be referred to the Crown Court). The list also includes a few associated summary offences – if these proceed to court they are dealt with by magistrates.

Recorded crime offences are grouped by the Home Office into one of nine major categories:

- violence against the person (with or without injury)
- sexual offences
- robbery
- burglary
- theft and handling stolen goods
- fraud and forgery
- criminal damage
- drug offences
- 'other' (e.g. blackmail, treason, perjury, libel, dangerous driving).

Most summary offences do not have to be notified to the Home Office and do not therefore enter into the recorded crime statistics. These tend to be dominated by motoring offences (in volume terms) but include a number of other categories such as drunkenness or social security offences.

Much anti social behaviour is not reported to the police in the first place, but if it is reported, it will only enter into the official crime statistics if it is on the list of notifiable offences. Nevertheless, anti social behaviour is likely to affect public perceptions about the extent and nature of crime, and people's views on their personal risk.

68. The impression that the notifiable list in England and Wales is relatively long may be occurring because comparison is being made with the United States, where the uniform crime reports forwarded to the FBI are based on a restricted range of serious offences (box C on page 29). We understand that the England and Wales list is not particularly long by European standards.

69. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly a desire in some quarters to reduce the number of notifiable offence categories<sup>22</sup>. This particularly applies to low-level violence that does not involve injury – for example, ‘section 5’ public order/harassment offences and common assault. Such offences were added to the notifiable list in 1998<sup>23</sup> and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has queried whether they add much to the overall picture:

*Due to ... many of these offences being more minor crimes coupled with how they come to police notice, ACPO believe they do not contribute to deliberations on trends in crime as much as may be assumed and that they are distorting the overall performance picture and with it public perceptions of the true risk of crime<sup>24</sup>.*

70. The technical report accompanying the recent HMIC quality review (paragraph 65 in this report) also noted that the *Offences Against the Person Act* is heavily reliant on case law and is a potential source of confusion for the police when recording violent crime.

71. As an alternative to prosecution, some police forces have been piloting community resolutions – getting those who have committed minor offences to acknowledge and think about the implications of their behaviour, and to make amends. This does not involve any formal legal process. The police still have to complete a crime record for the offence, but the method of disposal does not count as a sanction detection<sup>25</sup>. To the extent that police regard sanction detections as a performance measure (and have perhaps been set a local or personal target) this may deter them from making wider use of community resolutions. The argument was therefore put to us that removing these offences from the notifiable list would avoid criminalising young people. However, the problem seems to lie with the performance regime rather than the notifiable list. The recent White Paper<sup>26</sup> on policing states that

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22 See for example ACPO submission to the Statistics Commission Report on crime statistics; *Sir Ronnie Flanagan's Review of Policing: Final Report*, February 2008; and Jan Berry's interim and final reports, *Reducing Bureaucracy in Policing*, February 2009 and November 2009.

23 According to the Simmons review, this was done in order to prevent a 'drift' from notifiable to non-notifiable offence types, as the latter 'might ... contribute towards keeping crime counts unrealistically low'.

24 Submission to the Statistics Commission reproduced in *Crime Statistics: User Perspectives*, Report No. 30, Statistics Commission, September 2006.

25 A sanction detection is when a crime is cleared up through the use of a formal sanction such as a charge, police caution, penalty notice for disorder or cannabis warning, or when the offence is taken into consideration in other proceedings.

26 *Protecting the Public: Supporting the police to succeed*, Cm 7749, December 2009

consideration will be given to ways of recognising alternative resolutions within the performance management framework.

72. Other interviewees argued strongly that good management requires the continued recording and notification of each offence, and then taking a proportionate, professional decision about how to deal with it. It is not the inclusion of the offence on the notifiable list that determines whether the offender acquires a criminal record, but the method of disposal chosen by the police or Crown Prosecution Service. Offenders who are charged and dealt with by magistrates still acquire a criminal record. Furthermore, removal from the notifiable list might be interpreted as a signal that investigation of these offences can or should be de-prioritised. This is clearly a policy rather than a statistical decision.

73. A reduction in the number of offence categories being notified to the Home Office would also have implications for the Ministry of Justice, for example in measuring the proportion of crimes that are brought to justice, or in forecasting the workload of the courts.

74. Some interviewees suggested that the Home Office should focus on serious crime and that information on low level crime should only be published and used at a local level. This is also a policy question that goes beyond the remit of this review. The acceptability to the public of such a change would doubtless need to be considered, given that people's perceptions and priorities are often influenced by this type of crime. If implemented it would introduce further discontinuities into the recorded crime statistics. Clearly, careful planning, explanation and transitional arrangements would be required. Given the known public concern about anti social behaviour, it seems likely that there would still be a demand for national figures.

75. Our interviews with people both inside and outside the Home Office revealed a certain admiration for the simplicity and stability of the American reporting system. This covers a restricted range of offences (box C) and there have been very few changes (one offence added to the list in over 80 years). However, thousands of reporting agencies are involved and participation is voluntary, so there have been problems with non-response. Variations in legislation between states mean that it would be difficult to organise a more comprehensive reporting system and to be assured of consistent counting standards.

### **Box C: Uniform Crime Reports**

The Uniform Crime Reports collated by the FBI cover just eight offences that are considered to be serious, to occur relatively frequently and to be reported reliably to the police:

- murder and non-negligent manslaughter
- forcible rape
- robbery
- aggravated assault
- burglary
- larceny-theft
- motor-vehicle theft
- arson.

This constitutes a set of index crimes that can be used as basis for comparison between areas and over time. For other types of crime, only arrest data are currently collated.

A National Incident Based Reporting System has been in development since the 1980s. This aims to capture record-level data on a wider range of offences, but appears to be some way from completion (about a quarter of the population were living in NIBRS-compliant jurisdictions in 2007; some states were not participating at all and big cities were particularly under-represented).

### **Quality assuring police records**

76. As noted earlier, the need to ensure consistent recording of crime by the 43 territorial police forces has been a major factor in the changes introduced over the last decade or so. Many interviewees for this review felt that these changes have contributed to distrust in the statistical series.

77. The Simmons review looked in some depth at how to reduce the scope for confusion and inconsistency and at how to promote ethical recording. Simmons favoured the practice, already established in some forces, of employing professional staff to audit crime records and ensure that guidelines were being met – these staff would ideally be independent of operational staff and perhaps reporting directly to the Chief Constable. They have since been established in all police forces as ‘crime registrars’, who quality assure data and report to an ACPO rank officer who is not in the chain of command for reporting crime. Force crime registrars are coordinated by a national crime registrar based at the Home Office and the guidance with which they are provided includes a data quality audit manual.

78. Smith noted the improvements brought about by the implementation of (i) Simmons’s recommendation and (ii) the National Crime Recording Standard, which was audited by the Audit Commission over a four year period. Smith suggested that periodic independent audits should become a permanent feature of the system.

79. Interviewees for this review agreed that the independent auditing had worked well. While noting some areas for improvement, the Audit Commission was able to report a sustained improvement in crime data quality<sup>27</sup>. As noted in paragraph 66, however, the more recent HMIC review of the way police forces record most serious violence considered that the current lack of independent monitoring was a possible contributory factor to the error rate, and concluded that there is a need for better quality assurance.

80. Several interviewees told us that crime recording can be distorted by the existence of performance targets and that force crime registrars are having mixed success in promoting good practice. This might affect, for example, whether a crime is recorded at all, or which category is used.

81. The Home Office carries out a number of validity checks on the data it receives from the police, but the explanatory notes accompanying the annual crime bulletin do not give an account of how this is done. The scope for such checks may increase when its data hub (paragraph 59) is fully operational. It is also possible for the Home Office to look for anomalies between trends in police statistics and the BCS.

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<sup>27</sup> *Police Data Quality 2006/07*, Audit Commission, 2007

## The international context

82. As the above discussion demonstrates, it is inherently difficult to measure crime. The challenges are essentially the same in other countries. The statistics produced by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice are consistent with guidance issued by the United Nations<sup>28</sup>, and we have been told by independent commentators that they are considered good by international standards.

83. The BCS seems to be well-regarded for several reasons: the thorough way in which incidents described by respondents are coded to offences; the fact that attitudes and perceptions are measured; and the recognition given to repeat victimisation (being a victim of the same type of crime more than once in the last year). The existence of a national crime recording standard is also recognised as a plus, and the timeliness with which crime statistics are published seems to compare well with other countries.

84. It is worth noting that the recorded crime figures for England and Wales give a fuller and arguably more negative impression than is the case in some other countries. In England and Wales a crime record is initially created on the basis of prima facie evidence when an incident is first reported to the police (unless there is credible evidence that a crime has not taken place). Elsewhere, crime records are often created later in the process, after investigation by the appropriate authorities, and are therefore less likely to reflect the actual level of crime reported by the public. This may also mean that there is more emphasis on prosecution statistics, which one interviewee told us are more detailed in other parts of Europe than in England and Wales.

85. We have also been told that many countries have a more restrictive definition of violent crime than is the case in England and Wales, related more to the outcome of the offence (for example, whether the victim received hospital treatment or had to take time off work). This is another factor that needs to be taken into account before making international comparisons. There is also less emphasis in many other countries on the link between crime and anti social behaviour, with less effort to collect information about the latter.

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<sup>28</sup> *Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics*, ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/89, United Nations, 2003

## Summary and conclusions on measuring crime

86. The limitations of 'total' crime figures have long been recognised, but the desire for a single figure has tended to outweigh the argument against adding together offences of minor theft and extreme violence as if they were each of equal consequence.

87. Statistics on recorded crime are affected by the extent to which the public report crime to the police. This can vary by type of offence, from place to place, and over time. The identification of some types of crime (for example, street violence) is highly dependent on how the police deploy their resources. Analysis of trends in recorded crime therefore requires specialist knowledge, technical skill and a fair measure of caution. The BCS is a relatively robust source of trend information for the types of crime that can be measured effectively by a household survey. But although the BCS has a relatively large sample it is not able to provide statistics at a local level or measure the incidence of certain forms of crime with precision. Overall trends tend to be dominated by the more minor and less well reported offences, simply because there are more of them.

88. The number of offence categories that have to be 'notified' to the Home Office – and thus recorded – is large (though comparable with other European countries) and there have been calls for it to be reduced. The classification of violent crime is also the subject of an ongoing debate: the Home Office has taken steps to align its definitions with everyday usage of the word 'violent' but it is still the case that a large number of violent offences do not involve any injury. The discovery of inconsistencies in the way that GBH with intent was being recorded has added to the sense of confusion and hampered attempts to delineate serious violence (paragraph 64).

89. These are policy matters that extend beyond the scope of this review, but any changes would clearly have implications for statistical outputs. These would need to be managed carefully in order to avoid the risk of reducing rather than enhancing public confidence. Reducing the notifiable list would also have implications for the Ministry of Justice: for example, in measuring the proportion of crimes that are brought to justice; or in forecasting the workload of the courts. Furthermore, it could become harder to detect whether some offences are being downgraded, because a reduction in the number of crimes recorded in a more serious crime category would not be counterbalanced by recorded increases in lesser categories.

90. Removing some offence categories from recorded crime runs somewhat counter to the argument that much crime (as well as anti social behaviour that does not cross the crime threshold) is being missed by both the major sources of crime data, and that the public are therefore being given an incomplete and partial picture. Reducing the number of categories that have to be reported to the Home Office would make recorded crime yet more partial. It might be argued that these points of view could be reconciled if it were to be agreed that the formal statistics should focus on more serious crime while statistics on other types of incident (whether or not 'crimed') should be published at a local level. However, we think local data will inevitably be compared and collated into a national picture, so consistent recording would be essential and the Home Office or another agency would still need to oversee the collation process.

91. Inconsistencies in the recording of crime, and the possible distorting effect of performance targets, are a matter for concern. We have no way of knowing how prevalent these problems are at the moment, but it would seem prudent to reintroduce a system of unannounced audit checks, providing a cost-effective way of doing this can be found. As noted by the Smith Review, it may be that periodic and risk-based audits would suffice, 'provided they were clearly seen to be a permanent feature of the system'.

92. Changes and clarifications to the counting rules or the categorisation of offences have the capacity to increase distrust. This can be mitigated, to some extent, by advance notification of planned changes, estimation of their impact, and prompt information about any issues that come to light.

## 6. Trust in the statistics

*Ministers are in a no-win situation if whenever the statistics are 'bad' they are accepted and used to criticise the government and its policies and whenever the statistics are 'good' they are disbelieved as being 'fiddled' or 'false'.*

**Tim Holt, Presidential Address to the Royal Statistical Society, December 2007**

93. Views on the trustworthiness of crime statistics do not exist in isolation from trust in statistics generally or from confidence in the criminal justice system and other institutions of government. It is difficult – perhaps even unwise – to try to disentangle all of these issues. As in most areas, much of the information that people receive about crime and criminal justice comes from the media, but the extent to which the media leads or follows people's views is not always clear cut.

### Evidence of mistrust

94. ONS, MORI, the Home Office and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) have all carried out relevant research in this area (annex G). Some facts now seem to be well-established.

- The public believe that crime is increasing across the country as a whole, whereas the national statistics show that crime is relatively stable after a period of decline.
- The public tend to take a more pessimistic view about national trends than local. They are also more confident about the way that crime is being dealt with locally than nationally.
- The media is a major source of information about crime and criminal justice, and appears to play an important role in forming people's views on these subjects.
- Trust of official statistics in general is low by European standards, with some evidence that lack of trust results more from the way that statistics are presented and used than from the way they are produced (although the latter is still important).
- The police are more trusted as a source of information than civil servants or politicians.
- There is a public perception that sentencing is lenient, although sentences have in fact been increasing in severity (helping to drive the increase in the prison population<sup>29</sup>).

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<sup>29</sup> *The Story of the Prison Population 1995-2009, England and Wales, MoJ statistics bulletin, July 2009*

95. The gap between perceptions of change in local and national crime levels has been widening. According to the most recent annual data<sup>30</sup>, 75 per cent of those interviewed for the British Crime Survey in 2008/09 thought that crime had increased nationally, while just 36 per cent thought that crime had increased locally.

96. Gaps between actual and perceived trends have been observed in other public services and in other countries. However, the fact that such a crucial message from crime statistics has either not reached the public or is not believed by them is not just a concern for those who care about statistics. Policy makers are concerned that fear of crime has a direct impact on the quality of people's lives, and so reassurance becomes an important goal in its own right. This helps to explain why public confidence in the police and confidence in the rest of the criminal justice system have become major performance indicators.

97. There is evidence that people's perceptions about the level of crime in their local area are more likely to be rooted in actual experience and in what they observe locally (which includes anti social behaviour). The Smith Review made the following point in this context:

*... national crime data are misleading for most local areas because crime is very skewed in its geographical distribution. One consequence of this is that for most local neighbourhoods the national average will present a picture of crime risk that is higher than that which is experienced in the local neighbourhood. Another is that it is possible for crime rates to go either up or down but without this change in trend being reflected in most individual neighbourhoods ...*

98. Perceptions about the level of crime across the country as a whole are more influenced by media, demographic, and attitudinal factors. Research by both MORI and the Home Office suggests that the newspapers people read may exert an independent influence on these perceptions, after controlling for other factors.

99. This does not mean that people necessarily trust the press. They actually make clear distinctions between the trustworthiness of the national and local press, and between 'broadsheets' and tabloids. But MORI argues that there is a high level of exposure to what the national press say and this may have more influence on people's views than they are aware of or are willing to admit.

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<sup>30</sup> *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*, Home Office, July 2009. This question was asked of over 11,000 respondents, but those who had lived at their current address for less than three years (17 per cent of the sample) were excluded from the analysis.

100. For this review we talked to 29 people with a professional interest or involvement in crime statistics (annex B). They were in no doubt that the national crime statistics are distrusted, although some felt that the situation was no worse than in other areas of official statistics. One person felt that the national figures have lost all credibility and that while distrust is centred on these at present, there is a danger that it will spread to the local figures on which they are based.

101. Several of our interviewees had some knowledge of international crime statistics. They did not think there was the same level of media distrust in most other countries. Statisticians in Scotland and Northern Ireland reported that while they had experienced some 'cherry picking' by the media, their statistics had not attracted as much criticism. One factor that may contribute to this is that other countries with both types of data source (recorded crime and a victimisation survey) tend to publish the results separately (paragraph 119).

## Role of the media and politicians

102. A drop in crime, while good news, is not as newsworthy as an increase. Within an overall reduction there is likely to be a mixed picture, with trends in some crimes going up and others down. The existence of the two data sources, which can show contradictory trends, makes it even easier either to 'cherry pick' for something that has gone up, or to cast aspersions on the statistics. MORI found that recorded crime and BCS were often quoted in focus groups as specific examples where government, opposition and media used the discrepancies to score points.

103. Many of our interviewees placed some or most of the blame for public distrust with the media, while pointing out that politicians also play a role. It is certainly not difficult to find newspaper reports that are close to the 'unthinking, dismissive suspicion' that MORI noted in focus groups on government information, although there are also examples of 'sophisticated, healthy scepticism'. Some of our interviewees also pointed to the role played by discrepancies between recorded crime and BCS and to the regular changes in counting rules and classifications. As MORI has commented, in the short term scoring points from apparent discrepancies in the data sources can be a way of highlighting legitimate issues of concern. In the long term, however, it tends to undermine trust in all government information.

104. There can be a fine dividing line between the selective use of data in the cut and thrust of political debate and outright misuse of statistics. However, the Statistics Authority has recently questioned<sup>31</sup> the use of police statistics to illustrate long term trends in violent crime, as this was being done without qualification and without mention of the British Crime Survey.

105. The evidence in annex G suggests that distrust of official statistics often results from the way they are used and quoted. Most interviewees for this review expressed a degree of support for Louise Casey's proposal that the Statistics Authority or another independent body should draw up a public protocol on the responsible use of crime statistics and invite politicians, the media and interest groups to sign up to it. However, they had strong reservations about the practicalities and whether it could really be made to work.

## The distinction between statistics and other sources of data

106. We have not seen any evidence of political interference in the production of the aggregate National Statistics on crime and we are satisfied that the Home Office statisticians responsible for this work are fully committed to maintaining that integrity. However, other sources of data, such as those produced locally, are not subject to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. In addition, there have been controversies about the use of research evidence in government (recent examples include drug classifications, and the DNA database). This could affect trust in official statistics, since the distinctions that are made within government between official and other statistics, and between statistics and research, are not widely known or understood.

107. Research and statistics are separate analytical professions in government. The Government Social Research Unit provides training and good practice advice, but there is no statutory equivalent to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (although the GSRU has recently published guidance on the publication of research<sup>32</sup>). For both statisticians and researchers, quantitative skills, a sceptical approach to data and evidence gathering, and the 'authority to challenge policy colleagues' noted by the Crime and Justice Statistics Network (Annex J) are all important.

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<sup>31</sup> Statistics Authority press release, 4 February 2010, <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/index.html>

<sup>32</sup> *Publishing research in government*, Government Social Research Unit, January 2010

108. A sub-committee of the Government Statistical Service is currently looking at the presentation and dissemination of official statistics. It was suggested at the open meeting to discuss our interim report (annex I) that a greater degree of standardisation across the GSS might help to build trust, by establishing an identity that makes it easier to distinguish official statistics from other forms of numerical data.

## Concluding remarks on trust

109. Distrust is currently centred more on the national than the local statistics, and perceptions of the national statistics tend to be shaped by the media. Some sections of the media contribute to 'unthinking, dismissive suspicion' but politicians can also play a role. The discrepancies between sources of crime data and the regular changes in counting rules and classifications make it easy and tempting to score points, whether motivated by confusion or frustration or by political considerations.

110. Detailed, local crime data are a relatively new phenomenon, so it remains to be seen if similar issues will arise. The fact that local information is based on a single type of data (recorded crime) from a source that the public appear to trust (the police) may make this a little less likely.

111. People's perceptions about crime are influenced by the anti social behaviour they observe locally. If the notifiable list were to be reduced (paragraphs 67-74), then even less anti social behaviour would be reflected in the national crime statistics. Distrust of the national figures might therefore increase.

# 7. Presentation and release arrangements

*Across the media, police, lobby groups and others there seems to be a sense of hopelessness about the lack of public trust in statistics. Confusion seems to spring from the use of different statistics and also from the dismissal and undermining of the statistics by so many people, including professionals in the criminal justice system ... It may be true that the system needs to improve its recording, its accuracy and include other offences but, importantly, this action never seems to be complete and finished and no one seems to be able to reach agreement on a national picture.*

Casey review

## Issues of timing

112. The way that journalists report crime statistics is critical to public perceptions and confidence, because the public mainly obtain information on crime trends and patterns from the news media. When new statistics are issued, journalists have to work quickly to absorb the main messages and to obtain government and opposition comment. The content of the statistical release is therefore critical to ensuring that the authoritative statistical voice is not simply ignored in favour of political messages.

113. Under the terms of the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*, Ministers can be given sight of the statistics for up to 24 hours before they are released. In the case of the annual crime bulletin, the statisticians then hold a press conference. This is not attended by Ministers and, for the last couple of years, has been held away from Home Office premises and hosted by the National Statistician.

114. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that any government comment on statistics is issued separately from the statistics themselves. Nevertheless, the release of a policy statement at the same moment as the statistics may reduce the attention paid by journalists to professional statistical commentary, particularly if the policy release contains some of the same statistical data. It may also give the impression that the political comment and the statistical release have been co-ordinated in ways that go beyond simple matters of timing, and thus diminish the perceived independence of the statistics. These tensions have been considered in the Statistics Authority's review of the working of the pre-release access rules<sup>33</sup>. This recommends that such access should be reduced to a maximum of three hours and that there should be an interval of one hour between the release of the statistics and the release of ministerial comment on those statistics.

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<sup>33</sup> *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics: a review of the statutory arrangements*, UK Statistics Authority, March 2010

115. The Home Office publishes a detailed set of statistics in the bulletin, very soon after the annual reference period. It covers all types of crime and draws on data from police records, the British Crime Survey and other sources. Police and BCS data are also brought together in quarterly updates.

116. From the interviews for this review, it became clear that the statisticians are fully occupied in processing this large amount of material and have limited time to investigate what might be causing patterns and trends in the data before they are published. Even when a trend begins to be apparent, the pressure to produce a comprehensive range of statistics soon after the end of the financial year means that statisticians may have little opportunity to research and comment on explanations. The result is that as far as the media are concerned, the bulletin often lacks a clear narrative about what is happening and why.

117. Journalists are seeking a narrative. Some will have as little as 20 or 30 minutes before they need to file their story online. The volume of information in front of them can be overwhelming, and because of classification changes, sample error and random fluctuation, the statisticians cannot always confirm whether a crime they are interested in has gone up or down (or indeed stayed much the same), let alone provide a plausible explanation<sup>34</sup>. Meanwhile, the government of the day may be issuing a prepared statement, which journalists will have little opportunity to check or challenge. Opposition spokesmen will be approached for an instant response to the figures.

118. None of this is very conducive to informed coverage and debate and there is scope for genuine misconceptions and misjudgements because of the time pressures<sup>35</sup>. Even the timetabling of the annual bulletin is problematic for journalists, as it falls just before the parliamentary recess – a time when governments typically issue a raft of policy documents which will also be vying for their attention.

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34 The Crime and Justice Statistics Network has suggested (annex J) that the difficulty in trying to discern and explain trends in the aggregate figures might be overcome by presenting case studies with local levels of explanation.

35 One solution might be to offer Opposition politicians and journalists the same pre-release access, under embargo. The Statistics Authority has rejected this option on the grounds that it would further politicise the release of the statistics; create a perception of collusion between the media and government press offices; and blur the meaning of 'publication'.

119. Other countries do not seem to release such a wide range of data so quickly<sup>36</sup>, and tend to publish results from their victimisation surveys separately from recorded crime. These two sets of statistics are often produced in different organisations, and the victimisation survey may only be carried out intermittently. The result is that the two sources are not published at the same time, although there may be a degree of cross-referencing between them. Resource constraints may also mean that the release of the statistics is staged – for example, headline figures may be followed by a series of topic-based reports. Although not designed with media requirements in mind, such arrangements may be a factor in the more restrained media reporting that seems to occur elsewhere, including countries as nearby as Scotland and Northern Ireland.

## The statistical link between crime and punishment

120. The annual crime statistics for England and Wales are presented at a press conference and usually receive wide publicity. The published report contains a chapter on detections (which tends to receive relatively little coverage) but there is no follow through to show what happens in the rest of the criminal justice system. The annual volumes of criminal statistics and sentencing statistics produced by the Ministry of Justice start with some summary information about crime and detections but are not usually launched at a press conference and tend to receive less publicity than the crime statistics. This mirrors what happens at the individual and local level, where there is often more media coverage of the crime than of the outcome.

121. The publication by the Home Office and MoJ of very detailed, separate volumes makes it hard for the non-expert to find an answer to deceptively simple questions such as what proportion of crimes result in a conviction, caution or penalty; what form of retribution is applied to each type of crime; how long the whole process takes; and what length of sentence is actually served.

122. It was the ambition of the 1967 Perks review (annex D) to link data on crimes, offenders and events through the criminal justice system. This is still a long way off, although we understand that the Ministry of Justice is working to develop linked data systems. Even when this becomes possible, the time lags involved in investigating crimes, bringing prosecutions and serving sentences will make the presentation of the 'flow' statistics a complex task.

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<sup>36</sup> In the United States, for example, preliminary figures from the Uniform Crime Reports are published in the June after the calendar year to which they apply, with the final report in September. At the time of writing, the most recent data from the National Crime Victimization Survey relate to 2006.

123. In the shorter term, it ought to be possible to provide the public with a more joined up picture than is currently the case. The Home Office produced a series of digests<sup>37</sup> in the late 1990s which attempted to answer some of these questions in an easy to understand way. This series was discontinued and machinery of government changes subsequently placed responsibility for the criminal justice system with the Ministry of Justice, while crime and policing remained with the Home Office.

124. We have been told that very few countries have an end to end system that is able to track offences and offenders through the various stages. The lack of such a capability is a recurring theme in a recent review of the work of the US Bureau of Justice Statistics<sup>38</sup>. The US review also refers to the lack of a conceptual framework that would clarify the individual contribution made by each of the many data series, and make it possible to understand the extent to which steps and processes in the justice system are covered and explained by the available data. We think that such a framework would also be useful in an England and Wales context.

## Confusion between sources

125. The presence of two very different sources of data in the annual crime bulletin can make it harder for statisticians to convey a straightforward, coherent account of trends. It also makes it easier for critics to question the trustworthiness of crime statistics (paragraphs 52 and 102). This problem has occurred in other areas (for example, survey data on unemployment versus the claimant count) but in such cases the conceptual issues are more straightforward and it is easier (at least in theory) to select a preferred source. With BCS and recorded crime, the situation is more complex. Although BCS is the more complete measure for many types of crime, there will always be others (including some of the rarer but more serious offences) for which the administrative system provides a better measure, and there will be crimes which are not covered particularly well by either source.

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37 *Digest 4: information on the criminal justice system in England and Wales*, Home Office, 1999 <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/digest41.html>

38 *Ensuring the Quality, Credibility and Relevance of U.S. Justice Statistics*, National Academies Press, 2009

126. We will continue to need both measures (and others). This means the story will always be complex, although splitting the overall publication into more manageable topic areas might make it possible, in some instances, to focus on whichever source is the more appropriate. A guide to 'preferred sources' (as described later in paragraph 144) would lay down some benchmarks about the circumstances in which it is appropriate to use each type of data. This could be followed by people inside and outside government and might help to reassure those who are suspicious about the way that the statistics are being used and quoted.

127. The BCS has recently been expanded to include interviews with young people aged 10-15, and over the next year or so a wider range of information will become available about crimes recorded by the police (paragraph 59). These developments will further enrich the statistical information base, but they will also introduce new challenges for the communication of patterns and trends in the data.

## The tension between stability and change

128. As noted earlier, there have been some major changes in the counting of recorded crime (e.g. in 1998 and 2002). There are also regular, more minor changes, for example in response to changes in legislation. It was clear from our interviews with journalists and others that the cumulative effect has been to introduce confusion and doubt. Some argued strongly that a period of stability is now required: that it is impossible to discern real trends in crime and to communicate these to the public when counting rules and classifications are constantly being changed or clarified.

129. Others felt that an attempt should be made to get some kind of consensus on how to present crime statistics, and that the period immediately following the election of a new Parliament would present the best opportunity. Some also saw this as an opportunity for the Home Office to begin to focus on serious crime in the national statistics and for detailed reporting of lower level crimes to take place at a local level. This might be accompanied by a reduction in the number of notifiable offences – as noted earlier (paragraph 67), some interviewees thought the current level bewildering and unnecessary. The interim report of the Flanagan Review of Policing<sup>39</sup> was particularly concerned about the number of low level violent crimes added to the list in 1998 and called for a 'non-party political but truly cross party debate to inform a revision of recorded crime statistics'.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Review of Policing by Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Interim Report, September 2007*

130. Further changes in the collection or presentation of the statistics will inevitably provoke suspicion – in fact it was clear from our discussions with Home Office staff that this plays a role in constraining what they feel able to do. Continuing to make the same data available at the same level of detail, and planning any future changes so that the impact can be measured are clearly essential if suspicion is to be avoided.

## An index or basket of crime

131. The total volume of recorded crime is susceptible to variations in reporting by the public, recording by the police, legislation or other changes affecting the notifiable offence list, and police operational practices. This particularly affects less serious offences (which tend to dominate the statistical picture) and can obscure ‘real’ underlying change in criminal activity. And by default, all crime is given an equal weight, regardless of the harm caused. Nevertheless, interviewees with whom we discussed this issue had mixed views about the ideas in box D: a weighted index of crime (Statistics Commission) or a stable ‘basket’ of more serious crimes (Smith review). Their concerns included the following:

- the likely reaction of the public and media (which was seen as a major obstacle)
- further changes or additional measures of crime would cause suspicion or confusion
- the weighted index, in particular, would lack simplicity and transparency
- either proposal might send out a message that ‘low level’ crime is not viewed as important.

132. The Home Office consulted on these proposals in the 2007 annual crime bulletin. We understand that the number of responses was quite limited, but that there was support for the ‘basket of serious crime’. This was subsequently included in the 2008 bulletin, although it did not re-appear in 2009 because of the problems identified in recording GBH with intent (paragraph 64). There was little support for a weighted index.

## **Box D: Better ways of tracking crime?**

### **A basket of more serious crime**

The Smith review pointed out that trends in police recorded crime are difficult to interpret because of the wide range of offences on the notifiable list, with variable reporting and recording rates, many of which are susceptible to changes in counting rules, recording practices or local policing policies. One solution might be to track a stable basket of more serious crime, perhaps along similar lines to the Uniform Crime Reports in the USA (box C on page 29). This might be of particular value at a local level, where BCS data are not available.

### **A weighted index**

A simple count of overall crime makes no distinction between very serious and relatively trivial crimes. They are all implicitly given an equal weight. The impact on the crime rate of high volume, less serious offences would be reduced and that of more serious crimes increased if the latter were to be given a higher weight. Derivation of the weights might be based on the economic costs of crime; the maximum or the average sentence for each offence; or on public perceptions of crime.

133. Statistics Canada has recently reviewed approaches to determining the relative seriousness of crimes and concluded that a solution lay in using sentencing data from the court system<sup>40</sup>. It has developed a Crime Severity Index in which the incarceration rate<sup>41</sup> for each type of offence is multiplied by the average length of sentence handed down by the courts. Such an approach might be feasible in England and Wales which, like Canada, has extensive sentencing data.

134. However, there is a possibility that replacing the current total recorded crime measure with one of the above options would actually increase distrust, and this is a real concern. A similar problem would arise with the idea of concentrating on a smaller number of indicator crimes, with less emphasis on 'total crime', perhaps along similar lines to the Uniform Crime Reports (box C on page 29). This would be easy to understand, but in the words of one interviewee, it would still provoke the question 'what are they trying to hide?' However flawed, we think that a measure of total recorded crime should be retained in the interests of openness, but that there is no reason why one of the other options should not be developed as well, for presentation alongside the crime statistics or in a separate bulletin or research report.

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<sup>40</sup> *Measuring crime in Canada: Introducing the crime severity index and improvements to the uniform crime reporting survey*, Statistics Canada, 2009

<sup>41</sup> This is the proportion of people convicted of the offence who are sentenced to time in prison.

## Statistics or research?

*There are huge amounts of social data thrown out raw and they mean nothing because they need interpretation ... and the ONS usually feels it's not its job to provide that because it either requires a political judgement to be made or a ... sociologically informed judgement which they traditionally haven't been terribly well equipped with.*

### Opinion former – MORI research for the Statistics Commission

135. Many official statistics consist of a standard set of tables, consistent from year to year, with a neutral and very factual commentary. This has been described as 'statistical wallpaper' – a picture of the social and economic condition of society that, by its very constancy, allows observers to monitor and make judgements about the state of the nation. The constancy is no accident, because if the content keeps changing it becomes difficult to follow trends and the neutrality of the statistics is called into question: it looks as though whoever is compiling the data is pursuing their own agenda. The need for continuity was stressed in responses to the interim report for this review (annexes I and J).

136. Users of statistics accept this, but at the same time they often want insights and explanations as to what is going on. Journalists, in particular, may be suspicious if the statistics are delayed, the presentation changed, or if some material is omitted – but they will still want to know *why* a particular crime has gone up or down, or whether the recession is having an impact for example. These are reasonable questions and the Home Office has the analytical capacity to investigate them (although there would come a point at which the release of the statistics would have to be delayed in order to complete the research). Statistics without such insights can be bland and inconclusive: there needs to be agreement about the appropriate level of commentary. It ought to be possible to provide more insights without losing the coverage provided by the existing statistics – but probably not all in the same publication.

## Local crime statistics

*The current model for presenting traditional national crime statistics in the form of a published report with standard forms of tables and graphs is clearly not the appropriate model for making information available at a local level in a form that will be relevant. Not only are current national crime statistics publications difficult to understand, they do not immediately answer the questions we believe most people want to ask about crime: in particular, how much crime is there in my neighbourhood, how well are the local police tackling crime and what are the risks to me?*

### Smith Review

137. In response to recommendations from earlier reviews, the police have increased online access to local maps, charts and other data on recorded crime, and more recently the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) has provided a facility for local forces to display their data on a single website<sup>42</sup>. The national crime mapping website currently provides figures for anti social behaviour and for four categories of crime (burglary, robbery, vehicle crime and violence). These data are provided on a rolling three month basis for police force areas and lower geographies. Measures of public confidence, derived from police surveys<sup>43</sup>, were added in early 2010.

138. Annual data for local authority areas are also now available on government websites: Oneplace, Neighbourhood Statistics, and the Home Office site<sup>44</sup>. Some of these sites provide information on crime categories other than those chosen for the national crime mapping website, and there is a varying amount of information about how the data are collected. In March 2010 HMIC launched the *MyPolice* website. Primarily designed to give a rounded view of police performance, this includes annual force-level data on anti social behaviour and a range of crime categories, three of which can also be viewed at a local level. There is more information about how the data are derived than is available on some of the other websites.

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42 <http://maps.police.uk/>

43 The website uses police survey (as opposed to BCS) measures of confidence because the results are displayed for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships/Community Safety Partnerships. The BCS only provides results at police force level.

44 <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>  
[www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/)  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/soti.html>

139. There is little evidence as yet about the public response to the additional local data, although the NPIA has commissioned research to understand the public's needs and preferences for information on crime and policing, and to examine the impact of such information on public perceptions. Early indications<sup>45</sup> suggest that members of the public feel that they have a right to know about crime levels locally and will use websites when they have a specific purpose in mind. In other circumstances, they may prefer to receive newsletters. Because many people feel they already know which local areas are safe, the NPIA considers that there is a need to present additional information alongside crime maps – for example, on neighbourhood policing, and on police performance.

140. The impact of the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* has been raised with us (for example, in annex J) because there are concerns that the police are obliged to comply with very specific requests for data that may then be taken out of context. There is in fact an exemption under section 22 of the Act for data that are being prepared for publication, and we understand that the Ministry of Justice will work with the Home Office and ACPO to reach an agreed interpretation of the Act in relation to unpublished data.

141. Nevertheless, the concern about such requests does underline the need for all statistics to be accompanied by explanatory notes – including definitions, and information about any changes in geographical boundaries or in the counting rules or recording standards that might affect the interpretation of trends. This can be done on an ad hoc basis, in response to individual FoI requests, but the person making the request might also be referred to previously published advice. Comprehensive, general advice on websites would make this task easier.

142. When viewing local data, there is a risk that random fluctuations from one month to the next will be interpreted as evidence of some significant change in criminal activity, or as evidence of some new threat. The police themselves might over-interpret such data when making decisions on how to deploy resources. It might be helpful if appropriate software tools to enable the on-line interrogation of local data could be made more readily available. This might, for example, flag up changes that are within confidence intervals.

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<sup>45</sup> *Information provision: evidence-based top tips*, NPIA, December 2009. See also annex I to this report.

## Concluding remarks on presentation

143. Although the quality and comprehensiveness of the England and Wales crime statistics may compare well with corresponding statistics elsewhere, the existence of two major data sources and the difficulty of ensuring consistent recording across 43 territorial police forces undoubtedly pose some specific challenges.

144. Building statistical commentary around a combination of sources (as opposed to publishing one source at a time) is a necessary aid to interpretation, but the rationale behind the selection of data from each source needs to be explicit and widely accepted. It might therefore be helpful to have freestanding and authoritative advice as to when it is appropriate to use recorded crime, BCS or another data source, and to explain the kind of judgements that need to be made when no single source is ideal. To have maximum impact and gain wide acceptance, we think that the preparation of such guidelines should be overseen by the National Statistician. They would need to cover different kinds of offence as well as the issue of how to make comparisons between geographical areas or over time.

145. Alternative possibilities for measuring trends include using a standard basket of more serious crimes; developing an index that is weighted by the sentencing tariff or severity of each type of crime; or simply tracking a smaller range of indicator crimes that can be measured reasonably accurately (for example, crimes that are not particularly susceptible to changes in police deployment or to reporting variations). All these options are probably best seen as supplements to the existing data.

146. Local statistics are now more widely available than previously, appearing on several government websites with a range of geographies, time periods and crime categories. There may be a case for consolidating some of this effort. It would also be helpful to have more consistent and comprehensive explanatory and contextual material<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> The national crime mapping website, for example, might do more to explain the difference between incidents (which is the measure used for anti social behaviour) and crimes; and to make it clear that its 'all crime' figures include many more types of crime than the four crime types for which data and maps are provided.

# 8. Ensuring independence

*'We do not believe that sufficient emphasis has been placed on the importance of independent publication or commentary on crime statistics by a trusted body.'*

## Casey Review

147. Previous reviews have tended to make increasingly radical proposals about how to ensure the independence of crime statistics from government – and/or how to ensure that they are *perceived* to be independent.

148. Perks, writing in 1967, simply called for 'an authoritative commentary written by a professional statistician possessed of the necessary background knowledge of criminal law, police practice and the penal system'. Simmons, writing in 2000, recognised that the public would need reassurance that the proposed new annual volume (combining police and BCS crime statistics) was presenting an independent and authoritative picture. He recommended the possibility of an external editor, annually appointed.

149. By 2006, the Statistics Commission was calling for greater structural separation between the compilation and publication of the statistics and the parts of government responsible for policy. While it felt that responsibility for police crime statistics should remain with the Home Office (albeit at arm's length from its policy functions), it argued that consideration should be given to moving responsibility for the BCS to the Office for National Statistics.

150. The Smith review also recognised the importance of concerns about the independence (and perceived independence) of the statistics, but pointed out the tension between independence and relevance: statistics needed to be at the heart of policy-making and performance management. This led to a series of recommendations on how to separate the producers of statistics and statistical commentary from those who will be judged on the basis of the data, whether in the Home Office or the police.

151. Smith proposed that the annual report on crime should be published under the auspices of the new Statistics Authority, with any political commentary kept separate from the publication event and statistical press release. The BCS and other crime surveys should be regularly reviewed by a standing panel of independent experts which would comment on methodological and analytical issues. Both these recommendations have been implemented by the Home Office<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> The standing panel of independent experts was set up as the Surveys, Design and Statistics Subcommittee of the Home Office Science Advisory Committee.

152. The Casey review proposed that the Statistics Authority or another independent organisation should be given full responsibility for producing the national crime statistics. This call has been repeated in political circles<sup>48</sup>. Elsewhere in Casey's report, however, the emphasis (as in the above quote) is on publication and commentary, rather than on the production of the statistics.

153. The extent to which the public would distinguish between one government agency (the Home Office) and another (the ONS) is not clear. Alternatively, 'another independent organisation' might be a new body set up for the purpose. In considering the options, public trust is clearly a major (but not the only) consideration. The criteria that might need to be considered include the following:

- will it enhance public confidence in the statistics?
- will it maintain statistical quality and retain expertise?
- will it ensure continued Home Office access to the datasets for operational purposes?
- will it offer the best value for money?
- will disruption and other risks be minimal?
- will it help to establish a good relationship between the police and the statistical experts and have a positive impact on the way crime is recorded?
- will it fit with existing portfolios of work?

## Transferring responsibilities – arguments for and against

154. The issues here are not unique to England and Wales (box E overleaf). They reflect a wider debate about how to organise the statistical system in order to achieve the right balance between independence and relevance. Although it has a central statistical office (in the form of ONS) the UK has a relatively decentralised and devolved system, with many producers of statistics embedded in policy departments. Such statisticians are well placed to understand the administrative systems from which many statistics derive, and to respond to changing data requirements for policy or operational purposes, but it is harder for them to convince a sceptical media or public that the statistics are free of political influence:

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<sup>48</sup> *Restoring public trust in crime statistics*, Conservative Party, 2009

*It seems inevitable that if statistical production is embedded in a policy department there will be greater potential for political interference (or the perception of this, which is no less damaging) and hence a greater threat to public trust. The two elements that help a centralized statistical office to create a strong independent entity are its institutional boundary that separates it from other parts of government and its concern with statistical matters only. For statistical producers who are embedded in policy departments these two factors do not exist. This needs to be recognised and, if the benefits of decentralized and devolved systems are to be enjoyed, there is a need to work even harder at demonstrating professional independence and hence securing public confidence<sup>49</sup>.*

### **Box E: Who should be responsible for crime statistics?**

The UN Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics discusses three models. The main advantages and disadvantages can be summarised as follows:

#### **National Statistics Office**

- Savings from use of existing infrastructure
- Access to other datasets and skilled staff
- Priorities of the NSO may override those of the criminal justice system
- Distance from users

#### **Location within the ministry/department**

- Co-development of operational and statistical information systems and active use of data
- Credibility can be compromised; vulnerable to interference

#### **Location in an independent agency**

- Credible – no vested interests
- Inefficient use of resources
- Distance from data source

In an England and Wales context, it should be noted that there is considerable statistical expertise outside the NSO (in the Government Statistical Service) and that the Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that statistics be produced free from political interference.

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<sup>49</sup> *Official statistics, public policy and public trust*, Tim Holt, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A, 2008

155. The provisions of the Statistics Act and more recent events (in particular the premature release of statistics on knife crime and the ensuing debate) seem to have strengthened the role of statisticians within the Home Office and elsewhere in government<sup>50</sup>. During the interviews conducted as part of this review, we were assured that Ministers and civil servants are circumspect about release arrangements and the subsequent use of crime statistics and that there is no political interference in the production of the statistics.

156. It could be argued that the Home Office has a strong motive to ensure that the collection of crime statistics is adequately resourced, that the data are of good quality and that they keep pace with policy requirements. Given Home Office powers over and responsibility for the police, it is well placed to ensure that the recording of crime is as consistent and as ethical as it can be made to be. It was also pointed out to us that statisticians are currently able to exercise a degree of influence and control over the use of statistics within the department.

## Practical considerations

157. In the case of recorded crime, a decision would have to be taken whether to transfer responsibility for liaison with the police and the receipt of data from each force, or whether the Home Office would continue in this role with ONS or another body taking receipt of the finalised dataset and producing the annual and quarterly statistical outputs. The Home Office has powers as well as budgetary control over the police, including the statutory power vested in the Home Secretary under the Police Act 1996 to request data. The former option might not work effectively without a transfer of some of these powers. A decision would also be needed about responsibility for the Counting Rules.

158. In any administrative system of data collection, it is crucial that the statisticians and other analysts who use the statistics and set the parameters understand exactly how the data are created. In the case of recorded crime, that means a familiarity with police procedures and with any circumstances on the ground that might lead to errors, inconsistencies and other 'blips' in the data. It is harder for the Home Office to keep on top of this with 43 territorial police forces than it is for statisticians in Scotland and Northern Ireland, with a much smaller number. There is a risk that ONS or another body would be even more remote.

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the guidance sent to government departments by the Cabinet Secretary in 2009, appended to: [http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/letter\\_brennan\\_090227.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/letter_brennan_090227.pdf)

159. Policing and crime reduction are core responsibilities of the Home Office and it would continue to need access to recorded crime data in real time, for policy and management purposes. In addition, the research value of recorded crime data will increase once record level, as opposed to aggregate data, start to become available. The Home Office will need statistical expertise in order to obtain maximum use from both the recorded crime and BCS datasets. If responsibilities were transferred there would therefore be some duplication of effort.

160. The fieldwork for the BCS is currently contracted out to a commercial survey organisation. If responsibility were transferred to ONS, the question arises as to whether ONS would become the contract manager or whether it would take on some or all of the fieldwork itself at some point. If the latter, ONS would also need to decide whether and how the BCS would be incorporated into its Integrated Household Survey (IHS). Alternatively, ONS could simply receive the dataset and be responsible for the publication of the statistics. If responsibility were given to an agency that is independent of both the Home Office and ONS, this agency would probably take on the publication and possibly the contract management role. The BCS datasets are widely used within the Home Office for research purposes, and any new arrangements would need to guarantee that it had prompt access.

161. The BCS is a very significant contract for commercial survey organisations, which means they will tend to ensure that it receives a high priority for interviewer and other resources. There is some evidence for this in the current response rate (76 per cent) which compares favourably with other official household surveys. A drop in response would reduce the overall quality of the survey and could introduce discontinuities into the trend data.

162. The Home Office tests the market for the fieldwork periodically. This gives it the option of awarding the contract to another survey organisation. If a transfer to ONS resulted in a reduction or loss of such competitive tendering, this in itself could be contentious (and potentially lead to increased costs).

163. ONS has the survey skills and experience to take on BCS and it also has analytical skills (although little direct experience of crime data). It has highly skilled interviewers, but capacity might be a problem with a survey of this size (46,000 face to face interviews in 2008/09). Careful analysis of costs and benefits would be required in order to determine whether integration of the BCS with the IHS would result in any economies of scale, and to assess the implications for quality measures such as the response rate.

164. Our conclusions on whether a transfer of responsibilities is desirable are set out in paragraphs 7-14. On the whole, we think crime statistics should continue to be compiled and managed by the Home Office, but that there should be independent oversight of the production arrangements, and that the National Statistician should be responsible for publishing regular, independent commentaries on the statistics.

# 9. Measuring performance in the criminal justice system

*As with any public sector organisation, the police are measured on key areas of performance. It is therefore understandable that it is in these areas that resource and effort will be focussed ...*

## Flanagan review – interim report

*... it was also asked whether there should be a focus on statistics less as an outcome and more as part of the process. Thus, statistics should be used as a guide for developing policy and changing behaviour, rather than as an absolute measure of performance.*

### Comments to the Statistics Commission during its review of crime statistics

165. In setting performance targets, much harm can be done if statistics are chosen or used inappropriately<sup>51</sup>. The aspects of a service that matter most to people may not lend themselves to numerical measurement and what can be measured may be a poor substitute. The existence of a target may change the behaviour of service providers in ways that have unexpected and unwanted side effects. There may be scope for manipulation or gaming. And targets require the measurement of change over what may be relatively short periods of time. This can be problematic when the statistic is itself just a 'best estimate' and subject to random fluctuation. As a result of all this, there is a risk that policy-makers will mislead themselves, let alone the public. A distinction should be made, however, between performance targets and the collection of data that can be used to create a rounded picture for the purposes described in the second quote above.

## Measuring police performance

166. There have been major changes in the police performance management regime over the last few years. Following the Flanagan review of policing, the Home Office published a Green Paper signalling its intention to withdraw from 'micro management' of the police service. As a result, the vast majority of policing targets are currently set and managed locally, in response to local circumstances. There remains just one national or 'top down' numerical target: public confidence in the police and local council. This is measured by the number of BCS respondents who 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' with the following statement: *the police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area.*

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the statistical issues, see *Performance Indicators: Good, Bad and Ugly*, Royal Statistical Society, 2003 and *PSA Targets: the Devil in the Detail*, Statistics Commission Report No.29, 2006.

167. Similar questions are asked in the Communities and Local Government Place Survey and in local surveys organised by the police themselves. We understand that these different sources are yielding different results. There are context effects in each questionnaire and differences in wording and mode<sup>52</sup> that probably account for this, but it appears to be a recipe for confusion that may have been avoidable. Similar differences can be observed in survey figures on the satisfaction of victims of crime with the service provided by the police<sup>53</sup>.

168. Data for the earlier APACS (Analysis of Policing and Community Safety) performance indicators continue to be collected in order to provide a consistent evidence base to support planning and performance management. They are no longer used by the Home Office as a monitoring tool but are still taken into account by other bodies such as HMIC and the Audit Commission when making their assessments.

169. APACS comprises 36 indicators, including serious violent and acquisitive crime rates; serious offences brought to justice; re-offending; and public perceptions about crime, the police and the criminal justice system. The data are made available to the police and certain related organisations through iQuanta, an internet-based analysis tool maintained by the Home Office<sup>54</sup>. This allows the police and local partners to compare their own performance with those of similar forces or areas (although we have been told that such judgements have to be made with care because circumstances vary, even in apparently 'similar' areas).

170. Police performance is now being reported to the public through a range of channels including crime mapping, public meetings, HMIC inspection reports and the Comprehensive Area Assessment framework<sup>55</sup> that applies to local government areas. New 'Police Report Cards' appeared in March 2010 on an HMIC website. 'MyPolice' offers more comprehensive information on local crime and policing than the national crime mapping website, with data on sanction detections; protection from serious harm; confidence and satisfaction; and value for money. The site also provides information on data sources, and assessments of performance that are based on HMIC expertise as well as the data. It uses 19 of the 36 APACS indicators.

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52 BCS is face to face; Place is postal; and local surveys are often carried out over the phone.

53 For example, comparing BCS figures in *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Vol 1* with national figures collated from police user satisfaction surveys at [http://lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/ncjb/perfStats/satisfaction\\_p.html](http://lcjb.cjsonline.gov.uk/ncjb/perfStats/satisfaction_p.html). Although this has not always been made clear when the results are published, the police surveys cover a more restricted range of offences than BCS.

54 Another system (CJS Know-How) brings together performance information from the police, prosecutor and court databases and is also available to practitioners.

55 A new website for this was launched on 9 December 2009: <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

## Measuring the performance of the wider criminal justice system

171. Centrally prescribed targets for Local Criminal Justice Boards have also been dropped. They are now setting their own priorities in support of a PSA target set by the previous government in relation to CSR07: *deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public*. PSA 24 is being measured against five performance indicators, including the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in bringing offences to justice, and public confidence in the effectiveness and fairness of the CJS.

172. A Green Paper<sup>56</sup> issued in April 2009 stated that more information would be communicated on CJS outcomes in each area and on overall CJS performance. Since June 2009, the Ministry of Justice has published quarterly statistics showing the latest figures and trends for all PSA 24 indicators. The detailed figures for each criminal justice area are released simultaneously on the CJS Online website. It is also possible to access figures on offences brought to justice in each CJS area through the national crime mapping website and future developments are likely to include the outcome of cases at magistrates' courts.

### Public confidence as a target

173. Trust in the police and other elements of the criminal justice system is clearly important. However, there is a risk that confidence measures could come to reflect improved communication from the police and their partners (that is, more leaflets, public meetings and web pages) as opposed to real improvements in the service. Several interviewees for this review were unapologetic on this point, because they said research had shown that the police needed to improve their communication with the public and that this was therefore an important outcome in its own right.

174. A similar argument is sometimes made about fear of crime. The consultancy review for the Statistics Commission<sup>57</sup> noted that:

*... the extent to which statistics measuring fear of crime are actually related to true levels either of 'fear' or of crime, and to the performance of police authorities in tackling crime, is not clear. There is also a danger that setting too much value on fear of crime can drive policy inappropriately, with resources targeted to combat fear, where fear is high, to the detriment of utilising resources where they are specifically required to prevent crime.*

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<sup>56</sup> *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime*, Cm 7583, April 2009

<sup>57</sup> *Crime Statistics: User Perspectives*, Report No.30, Statistics Commission, September 2006

175. Interviewees for a MoJ research project<sup>58</sup> were asked an open ended question to identify what factors or measures would improve their confidence in the CJS. 'More police on the streets', 'tougher sentencing', 'offenders serving the full sentence', and 'consistency in sentencing' were identified by the highest proportions. All four of these activity measures are quantifiable and much of the information exists, albeit dispersed through various statistical series. It would seem sensible to ensure that these and similar measures are more readily available, at national and (where possible) local levels.

## Use of local survey data

176. The Home Office has published guidance<sup>59</sup> for the police on the conduct of user satisfaction surveys (which provide data for some of the APACS measures). This guidance does not currently say anything about how the findings of such surveys might be relayed to the public, as opposed to practitioners (via iQuanta). We think that it should include more advice on the analysis and presentation of results to the public.

177. The Home Office is also working with police bodies and the Association of Police Authorities to strengthen guidance on the conduct of surveys of the local population that are intended to measure public confidence. This guidance helps to ensure some consistency in sampling, survey processes and questioning. However, it does not overcome differences in the way surveys are administered. The minimum technical requirement does not specify whether postal, telephone or face to face surveys should be used, although it cautions against other techniques such as citizen's panels or web-based surveys.

178. These variations in survey method mean that while local surveys can be used to follow local trends, they should not be used to make comparisons between areas or compared with national figures.

179. The results of local surveys, and statistics on recorded crime and police performance, should be disseminated to the public – and used by practitioners – with sufficient context and analysis. It is important to ensure, for example, that random fluctuations in crime from one month to the next are not confused with real trends. It is useful to be able to compare local crime rates via the national crime mapping website, but it is also important to take a step back

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<sup>58</sup> *Confidence in the criminal justice system: What lies beneath?* Ministry of Justice Research Series 7/07. Findings based on interviews with approximately 2,000 people using random location quota sampling.

<sup>59</sup> *Definitions and survey guidance for APACS measures of user satisfaction 2008/09*, Home Office, June 2008 (revised October 2008)

and consider what might account for variations between areas and over time, and the extent to which crime rates are a measure of police performance.

180. The approach taken by the Care Quality Commission and NHS Trusts in the conduct and presentation of surveys of NHS patients may provide some useful pointers here<sup>60</sup>. In Northern Ireland, statisticians at the Policing Board have developed a template for the police service to use in reporting performance to District Policing Partnerships<sup>61</sup>. It might be useful if good practice guidance could be developed for the police service in England and Wales.

## Availability of data

181. The number of agencies and websites involved in the publication of statistics on the criminal justice system may be impeding effective communication. Even with efficient linking and signposting, it can be hard for the public to obtain a complete and consistent picture of performance. For example, data on recorded crime for various time periods and geographies are available from the national crime mapping website (hosted by the NPIA), the Home Office, Neighbourhood Statistics (hosted by ONS), HMIC and individual police forces. The Home Office, Ministry of Justice, National Criminal Justice Board (via CJS online), the national crime mapping website, the Youth Justice Board and HMIC all publish information relating to some aspects of outcome or performance in the criminal justice system. Data on both recorded crime and local performance indicators for elements of the criminal justice system are also included on the 'Oneplace' website. This brings together information (mainly at local authority level) that has been collected for the Comprehensive Area Assessment framework and judged by six independent public service inspectorates.

## Summary and conclusion on performance measures

182. The Home Office has set the police a single performance target – to increase confidence in the way that they and local councils are dealing with crime. However, a wide range of other performance targets remain: for the police (at a local level); for the rest of the criminal justice system; and for local areas, which are subject to the national indicator set. Earlier targets used by the Home Office remain as an evidence base to support planning and performance management. Some of these measures rely on local surveys that employ a

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60 <http://www.cqc.org.uk/usingcareservices/healthcare/patientsurveys/hospitalcare/inpatientservices.cfm>

61 [http://www.psni.police.uk/index/b-district/b\\_district\\_statistics.htm](http://www.psni.police.uk/index/b-district/b_district_statistics.htm)

variety of methods and do not produce results that are consistent enough to allow comparisons between areas or with the national figures, and there has been little guidance as to how the results of local surveys should be analysed and communicated to the public.

183. The public may wish to examine a wider range of performance measures than confidence, and indeed are often encouraged to do so – for example, one of the objects of the National Crime Mapping Website is to encourage a dialogue between the public and their local police service. These measures are currently available on a variety of websites with varying degrees of explanation as to definitions, data sources and how each measure has been arrived at.

184. In addition to reviewing whether such information ought to be consolidated and presented to a more consistent standard, we think that it would be helpful if the public were provided with some independent advice about the validity of different performance measures. This would explain, for example, that it is sometimes possible for recorded crime figures to go up or down without any change in the actual level of crime; and that the crime rate is affected by a number of factors and may not necessarily be a measure of police performance. It would also explain why detection rates need to be interpreted with care, and point out the implications of change in the performance of one part of the Criminal Justice System for another: other things being equal, for example, a decline in crime is likely to have an impact on the target of bringing more offences to justice.

# Annex A: Project Board

Partha Dasgupta (Chair)	Non-executive member, UK Statistics Authority
Richard Alldritt	Head of Assessment, UK Statistics Authority
Iain Bell	Chief Statistician, Ministry of Justice
Professor Sheila Bird	MRC Biostatistics Unit, Cambridge University and Vice President, Royal Statistical Society
David Blunt	Chief Statistician, Home Office
Kate Chamberlain	Chief Statistician, Welsh Assembly Government
Richard Garside	Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Kings College London
Professor Mike Hough	Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Kings College London and President, British Society for Criminology
Richard Laux	Director, Assessment Programme, UK Statistics Authority
Chris Lewis	Institute for Criminal Justice Studies, Portsmouth University
Matthew Norwell	London Borough of Greenwich
Caron Walker	Office of the National Statistician, UK Statistics Authority

Note: non-Statistics Authority members attended in a personal capacity as experts rather than as representatives of their organisations.

## Annex B: Interview participants

Gordon Barclay	Home Office
Iain Bell	Ministry of Justice
Jan Berry	Reducing Bureaucracy in Policing Advocate
David Blunt	Home Office
Jeremy Crump	National Policing Improvement Agency
Richard Erskine	Northern Ireland Office <sup>62</sup>
Richard Ford	The Times
Brian French	Northern Ireland Office
Ian Gallagher	Northern Ireland Policing Board
Professor Tim Hope	Keele University
Chris Kershaw	Home Office
Tony Mathewson	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency/ Police Service of Northern Ireland
Lawrence Morris	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
Sir David Normington	Home Office
Denis O'Connor	HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary
ACC Douglas Paxton	Association of Chief Police Officers
Paul Quinton and Brian Clifford	National Policing Improvement Agency
Stephen Rimmer and Jae Samant	Home Office
Carl Robinson	National Force Crime Registrar
David Signorini	Scottish Government

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<sup>62</sup> In April 2010 responsibility for policing and criminal justice transferred from the NIO to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive

Paul Smit	Netherlands Ministry of Justice
Alan Travis	The Guardian
Professor Andromachi Tseloni	Nottingham Trent University
Alison Walker and Debbie Moon	Home Office
Paul Wiles	Home Office
Simon Wren	Home Office

# Annex C: Main statistical series relating to crime and criminal justice in England and Wales

(National Statistics publications = NS)

## Annual publications

### Home Office

- Crime in England and Wales (full annual report) and supplementary volumes [NS]
- Police service strength (biannual) [NS]
- Firearms certificates, England and Wales [NS]
- Drug seizure statistics, England and Wales [NS]
- Drug misuse declared: Findings from the British Crime Survey [NS]
- Police powers and procedures [NS]

### Ministry of Justice

- Criminal statistics, England and Wales, and supplementary volumes [NS]
- Sentencing statistics, England and Wales [NS]
- Offender management caseload statistics [NS]
- Prison population projections [NS]
- Re-offending of adults: Results from a cohort study [NS]
- Re-offending of juveniles: Results from a cohort study [NS]
- Statistics on deaths reported to coroners [NS]
- Statistics of mentally disordered offenders, England [NS]
- Statistics on race and the criminal justice system
- Statistics on women and the criminal justice system
- Her Majesty's Courts Service user survey
- Youth Justice Board workload statistics
- Safety in custody statistics

## **Welsh Assembly Government**

- Crime in Wales [NS]

## **Quarterly publications**

### **Home Office**

- Crime in England and Wales (quarterly update – three times a year around the annual volume) [NS]
- Statistics on terrorists and outcomes

### **Ministry of Justice**

- Time intervals for criminal proceedings in magistrates' courts [NS]
- Sentencing statistics brief, England and Wales
- Probation statistics brief
- Criminal justice system performance information
- Knife crime sentencing quarterly brief
- Court statistics quarterly
- Local statistics on the re-offending of adults on the probation caseload
- Licence recall and return to custody

## **Monthly publications**

### **Ministry of Justice**

- End of custody licence releases and recalls
- Population in custody

# Annex D: Recommendations from earlier reviews of crime statistics

Before summarising the more recent reviews, it is worth drawing attention to some points that were made by a much earlier review in relation to record-keeping and sharing of data in the criminal justice system.

## Perks<sup>63</sup>

As long ago as 1967, the Perks committee called for more detailed information about offences (relating to victims, types and value of stolen property and scenes of crime) and for fuller information about offenders. It said records should be linked so that there would be an integrated system from the initial crime record to subsequent court proceedings and penal treatment. The committee was forward thinking about information technology, recommending the use of a single computer organisation for criminal and penal statistics. It was also anxious to avoid the duplication of effort and expenditure that would arise if the development of statistics for operational purposes were carried out independently of the national crime statistics: *'we wish it to be clear that our proposals do not involve the subordination of either to the other, but the development of a system that embraces both'*.

Some of these ambitions have still to be realised. As mentioned at paragraph 59, the Home Office still receives aggregate statistics from police forces, not individual crime records. This is changing, and in a year or so it will have record level data for the first time, opening up new opportunities for research into crime patterns. We have been informed that such data are beginning to be common in Europe, but are less available in other parts of the world.

The vision of an integrated information system spanning the criminal justice system is still some way off: the information systems used by the police, courts, prison and probation services are largely sealed off from one another. Given the complexity of what needs to be counted at different points in the process – offences, offenders, victims – and the varying time lags between each offence and events downstream, this makes it even more difficult to make a clear link, statistically, between crimes and their outcomes. Internationally, we understand that the level of integration envisaged by Perks is very rare indeed, and likely to be confined to countries that are setting up new systems from scratch.

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<sup>63</sup> Report of the Departmental Committee on Criminal Statistics, Cmnd. 3448, December 1967

## **Simmons<sup>64</sup>**

The next major review of crime statistics was in 2000 and conducted by Jon Simmons. This resulted in 66 detailed recommendations and led to the prima-facie, victim-focused approach to the recording of crime which is now embedded in the National Crime Recording Standard (box A on page 24). It also recommended the current practice of producing an annual volume of crime statistics in which police recorded crime and data from the British Crime Survey are presented together, alongside other sources of information.

## **Statistics Commission<sup>65</sup>**

The former Statistics Commission set out to examine:

- who uses crime statistics and for what purposes
- whether the available statistics meet those purposes, and
- whether further statistical sources or outputs needed to be developed.

The Commission concluded that crime statistics were broadly fit for policy making purposes but were generally not local enough for the public and local agencies to use. The exclusion of many summary offences, such as low level anti social behaviour, also contributed to a lack of fit with what the public might want. Noting a lack of public trust in the statistics, it called for greater structural separation of responsibility for the compilation and publication of the statistics from the parts of government responsible for policy. It also called for greater clarity in the presentation of the statistics, particularly when choosing whether to use recorded crime or data from the British Crime Survey.

## **Smith<sup>66</sup>**

The next review, led by Professor Adrian Smith, was commissioned by the Home Secretary and reported in November 2006. It made numerous recommendations for extending the coverage of survey data on crime; auditing police data; improving the presentation of the national statistics; and for greater separation between statistical and policy staff. There was a particular emphasis, however, on shifting the focus of crime statistics from the aggregate national picture to the provision of local data.

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64 *Review of Crime Statistics: A Discussion Document*, Home Office, July 2000

65 *Crime Statistics: User Perspectives*, Report No.30 Statistics Commission, September 2006

66 *Crime Statistics: An independent review*, November 2006

## Casey<sup>67</sup>

Crime statistics also featured in a more recent review of crime, justice and community involvement undertaken by Louise Casey at the request of the Prime Minister. An extensive programme of public engagement fed into this review and led to the conclusion that the public have lost trust in official crime statistics and do not feel they are given enough local information about crime.

Casey recommended that the Statistics Authority or another independent body should be given full responsibility for producing the national crime statistics and should draw up a public protocol on the responsible use of the statistics, which politicians, the media, and interest groups would be invited to sign. Locally, information should be provided on a monthly basis as part of wider engagement between the police and the public. A web-based service should be developed that would allow the public to compare levels of crime and the performance of criminal justice services in each area.

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<sup>67</sup> *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime, A review by Louise Casey, Cabinet Office, June 2008*

# Annex E: Specimen CRIMSEC3 return

CRIMSEC3 - Crime Statistics 2008/09

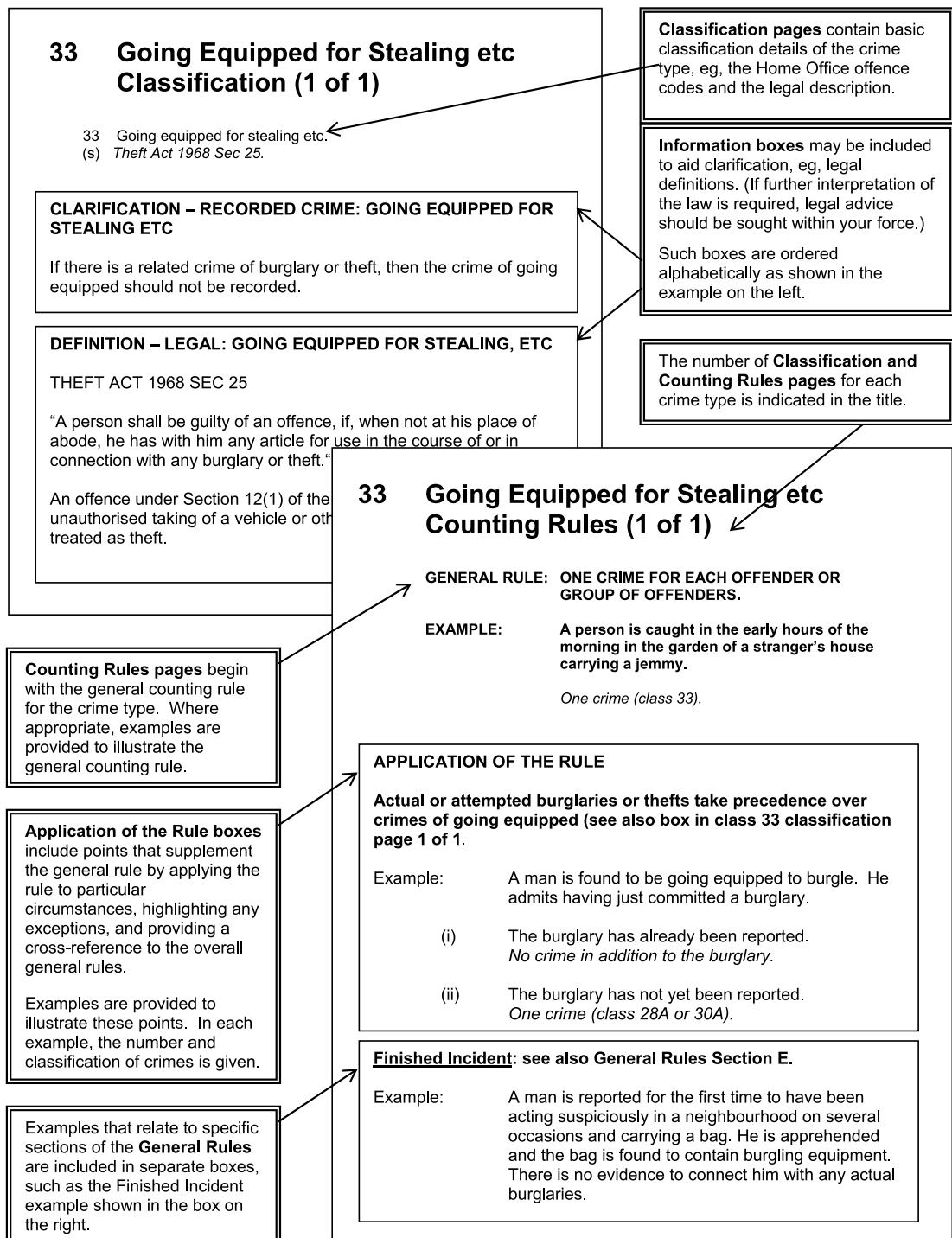
Force:   
 BCU:   
 Month:

Code	Offence	Offences: Cumulative Total to End Month	No Crimes: Cumulative Total to End Month	Cumulative Detections to End Month by:						Total
				Charge / summons	Cautions	TICs previously recorded	TICs not previously recorded	Fixed Penalty Notices	Other	
1	Murder									
2	Attempted murder									
3A	Conspiracy to murder									
3B	Threats to kill									
4.1	Manslaughter									
4.2	Infanticide									
4.3	Intentional destruction of a viable unborn child									
4.4	Causing death by dangerous driving									
4.6	Causing death by careless driving under influence of drink or drugs									
4.7	Causing or allowing death of child or vulnerable person									
4.8	Causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving									
4.9	Causing death by driving: unlicensed drivers etc.									
4.10	Corporate manslaughter									
5A	Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life									
5B	Use of substance or object to endanger life									
5C	Possession of items to endanger life									
6	Endangering a railway passenger									
7	Endangering life at sea									
8F	Inflicting grievous bodily harm without intent									
8G	Actual bodily harm and other injury									
8H	Racially or religiously aggravated inflicting grievous bodily harm without intent									
8J	Racially or religiously aggravated actual bodily harm and other injury									
8K	Poisoning or female genital mutilation									
8L	Harassment									
8M	Racially or religiously aggravated harassment									
9A	Public fear, alarm or distress									
9B	Racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress									
10A	Possession of firearms with intent									
10B	Possession of firearms offences									
10C	Possession of other weapons									
10D	Possession of article with blade or point									
11	Cruelty to and neglect of children									
12	Abandoning child under two years									
13	Child abduction									
14	Procuring illegal abortion									
15	Concealing an infant death close to birth									
16	Buggery									
17	Indecent assault on a male									
17A	Sexual assault on a male aged 13 and over									
17B	Sexual assault on a male child under 13									
18	Gross indecency between males									
19A	Rape of a female									
19B	Rape of a male									
19C	Rape of a female aged 16 and over									
19D	Rape of a female child under 16									
19E	Rape of a female child under 13									
19F	Rape of a male aged 16 and over									
19G	Rape of a male child under 16									
19H	Rape of a male child under 13									
20	Indecent assault on a female									
20A	Sexual assault on a female aged 13 and over									
20B	Sexual assault on a female child under 13									
21	Sexual activity involving a child under 13									
22	Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16									
22A	Causing sexual activity without consent									
22B	Sexual activity involving child under 16									
23	Incest or familial sexual offences									
24	Exploitation of prostitution									
25	Abduction of female									
26	Bigamy									
27	Soliciting for the purpose of prostitution									
28	Burglary in a dwelling									
28:1	of which, attempted burglary in a dwelling									
28:2	of which, distraction burglary (including attempts)									
29	Aggravated burglary in a dwelling									
30	Burglary in a building other than a dwelling									
30:1	of which, attempted burglary in a building other than a dwelling									
31	Aggravated burglary in a building other than a dwelling									
33	Going equipped for stealing, etc									
34A	Robbery of business property									
34B	Robbery of personal property									
35	Blackmail									
36	Kidnapping									



# Annex F: Sample offence from Home Office counting rules

## Layout of Classification & Counting Rules pages



All Counting Rules enquiries should be directed to the Force Crime Registrar

# Annex G: Evidence about trust in crime statistics

The sources drawn on here include the following:

- ONS reports on Public Confidence in Official Statistics (PCOS). In 2004, ONS and the former Statistics Commission started a joint project to obtain a better understanding of the nature of confidence in official statistics. The work involved the general public and opinion formers, using both survey and qualitative methods. It did not focus specifically on crime statistics, although domestic burglary was chosen as one of six topic areas that were explored with the public. Follow up surveys were carried out in 2005 and 2007. The UK Statistics Authority commissioned a further survey in late 2009, the results of which were published in March 2010.
- MORI (now Ipsos MORI) have drawn on various surveys and focus groups to explore public views on crime and criminal justice, and the influence of the media on people's views. They have also examined public trust in government information.
- The Home Office has used BCS data as a starting point for further exploration of the factors affecting people's beliefs about trends in crime and their confidence in the criminal justice system.
- The Casey review included questionnaire surveys with the public, and a review of the existing evidence about factors that influence public perceptions of crime.

## Official statistics

Three ONS PCOS surveys were carried out between 2004 and 2007<sup>68</sup> and found little change in public attitudes over that time. More than two thirds of respondents believed official figures were changed to support a particular argument and more than half thought that there was political interference in their production. The overall findings from the 2004 project<sup>69</sup> suggested that people did have confidence in the methodologies used to produce the statistics and in the accuracy of the outputs, but were concerned about political interference at certain stages – particularly in determining statistical definitions and choosing which statistics to collect. There was a perception that statistics were manipulated by government and misrepresented by the media.

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68 *Public Confidence in Official Statistics: An analysis based on data collected in the ONS Omnibus Survey*, Francis Jones and Anna-Marie Jones, February 2005; *Public Confidence in Official Statistics: ONS Omnibus Survey March 2005*, Eileen Goddard; *Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2007*, Omnibus Survey Report No. 35, Deborah Lader. Around 1,700 people were interviewed for the 2004 and 2005 surveys, and 1,100 in 2007. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=13967>

69 *Public Confidence in British Official Statistics*, Maryanne Kelly, ONS, February 2005

The most recent survey in the series<sup>70</sup> found that a clear majority of the public (59 per cent) continue to believe that there is some political interference in the production of official statistics. The proportion disagreeing with the statement that 'official figures are generally accurate' was (at 40 per cent) higher than in any of the previous PCOS surveys. Just over half of this latter group thought that the figures were manipulated or adjusted for political purposes.

The level of trust in official statistics in the UK appears low by European standards. A Special Eurobarometer survey<sup>71</sup> in 2007 asked people in the 27 Member States how much trust they had in statistics such as those on unemployment, inflation and economic growth. The UK had the lowest proportion of citizens who 'tended to trust' the statistics (33 per cent, compared with a European average of 47 per cent) and the second highest proportion who 'tended not to trust' (58 per cent compared with an EU27 average of 45 per cent).

## Crime statistics

The ONS PCOS surveys asked about trust in the statistics on domestic burglaries, alongside statistics on five other topics. Burglary may well elicit different answers from a question that just uses the word 'crime', and some of the other topic areas were changed over the years. However, it is worth noting that on the 10 point scale of trust/distrust used in the survey for each set of statistics, trust in burglary statistics changed little over the years and tended to be ranked lower than most other topics.

The more recent 2009 NatCen PCOS Survey also found little alteration in the level of trust for burglary figures. 'Personal experience' featured more prominently as a reason for distrusting the burglary figures than in 2007, overtaking the belief that the figures are difficult to count or measure. Those who did trust the burglary figures tended to think the opposite (that the figures are easy to count) or they also quoted personal experience.

ONS held nine focus groups across England, Scotland and Wales in 2004<sup>72</sup>. The accuracy of crime statistics was 'universally distrusted' for several reasons: the direction in which the statistics were reportedly going did not match people's personal experience; the conflict between BCS and police figures; and the belief that statistics were not collected on certain types of offence (e.g. vandalism).

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70 *Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2009*, NatCen, March 2010. Based on 1,333 interviews with respondents to the NatCen Omnibus Survey

71 *Special Eurobarometer 67: Europeans' Knowledge on Economical Indicators*, European Commission, Spring 2007. The sample size in most countries was 1,000+ (1,319 in the UK).

72 *Public Confidence in Official Statistics: A qualitative study on behalf of the Office for National Statistics and the Statistics Commission*, ONS, February 2005

The Casey Review also concluded that the public did not believe the official statistics on crime. The public believed that the statistics missed some important crimes; that many minor crimes were unreported; and that there was cherry picking by the media and politicians, professionals and lobby groups. They also had little awareness of what happens to offenders after they have been caught. Casey felt that there was in fact a lack of information on this in the public domain.

The main questionnaire used in the Casey Review was not distributed to a representative sample of the public – participants were self selected, and probably had a pre-existing interest in the subject. Some were working in the criminal justice system or in voluntary or pressure groups. In answer to an open-ended question asking how they decided whether crime was going up or down, only 3 people out of 1,502 said they relied on the published statistics – but 10 per cent made comments about their lack of faith in the statistics, which they said were confusing, inaccurate or could not be trusted.

The BCS has revealed a widening gap between how people think crime is changing nationally and in their local area. By 2008/09, 36 per cent thought crime had increased in their local area over the previous two years, whereas 75 per cent thought it had increased nationally<sup>73</sup>. Analysis of additional questions in the BCS that year has shown that the difference between perceptions of change in national and local crime levels is greatest for gun and knife crime: that is, for rarer and more serious events that attract media attention<sup>74</sup>.

People's perceptions about crime in their local area have been compared with local figures calculated for the Index of Multiple Deprivation from recorded crime data. This analysis showed a clear relationship between actual levels of crime and perceptions about whether the level of crime in the area was above or below average and about whether it was increasing. On the other hand, there was no relationship between the level of crime in the area of residence and perceptions that crime had increased nationally<sup>75</sup>.

## Trust in professions and institutions

One of MORI's conclusions from its wide-ranging review of crime and public perceptions<sup>76</sup> was that the police should publish more information on crime. In a 2003 survey, 23 per cent said they received information from the police, but 68 per cent said they trusted the police to tell the truth about how crime is being dealt with.

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<sup>73</sup> *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09 Vol 1*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 11/09, July 2009

<sup>74</sup> *Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour: findings from the 2008/09 British Crime Survey*, Home Office, November 2009

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

<sup>76</sup> *Closing the Gaps: Crime and Public Perceptions*, Bobby Duffy et al, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, December 2007. A range of survey findings were brought together in this review; the findings in these two paragraphs were based on samples of around 2,000.

MORI has also shown that when asked to choose from a list of professions, the public have most trust in doctors and teachers to tell them the truth, followed by judges and the police. Levels of trust in politicians and journalists were much lower, with civil servants occupying the middle ground. These relative rankings changed little between 1983 and 2006.

ONS measured the average level of trust in various public sector institutions for its PCOS surveys and found that the NHS, police and courts scored ahead of the civil service, and well ahead of local councils and the UK government. The more recent NatCen PCOS survey found little change in the levels of trust for the police, courts and civil service since 2007. However, trust in the NHS has increased and trust in the UK government has declined.

Various aspects of public confidence in the criminal justice system have been monitored in the British Crime Survey. Questions asked between 2001/02 and 2007/08 revealed that more than three quarters of respondents thought the system respected the rights of people accused of committing crimes and treated them fairly, but only around a third thought it met the needs of victims of crime<sup>77</sup>. Questions on sentencing in the 2004/05 survey showed that over three quarters of respondents thought the sentences handed by the courts were too lenient. However, when asked to estimate what proportion of convicted burglars or rapists is sent to prison, it was also clear that there was a disparity between these perceptions and actual sentencing practice<sup>78</sup>.

## The role of the media

The public gather most of their information about crime and about official statistics from the media. ONS, for example, found in its 2007 survey that nearly three quarters used television to form opinions about current issues; 60 per cent used newspapers and fewer than half (44 per cent) said they used family or friends. MORI noted that even when people gave 'personal experience' as a reason for mistrusting official information, when they were probed further they often reverted to information they had gleaned from the media.

MORI concluded that the public's perception of rising crime rates and the gap between views of the local and national situation are both 'in large part' due to the media. When asked directly why they thought crime had increased, people were much more likely to mention the television and newspapers than their own or other's experiences. In qualitative studies it was found that people generally lacked direct experience of crime and the CJS, drawing instead on media coverage for their views.

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<sup>77</sup> *Crime in England and Wales 2007/08*, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/08, July 2008

<sup>78</sup> *Policing and the criminal justice system – public confidence and perceptions: findings from the 2004/05 British Crime Survey*, Home Office online report 07/06 <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/06/rdsolr0706.pdf>

The message MORI took from this was as follows:

*Rather than trying to close the perception gap between views of national trends in crime and actual changes, it may be more effective to concentrate attention on the more positive and in many ways more important perceptions of how crime is dealt with locally, through promoting neighbourhood flexibility and control.*

Home Office multivariate analysis of BCS data<sup>79</sup> has found that newspaper readership is independently related to perceptions of crime, making a strong contribution to perceptions of the national crime rate. Readers of the national tabloids were more likely than readers of broadsheets to think national crime levels have increased.

This research also suggests a further slant on the local/national perception gap. The correlation between perceived changes in the local and the national crime rate was quite modest, suggesting that different factors may be at work. Logistic regression indicated that people's views about the level of crime across the country as a whole tend to be most closely associated with age and newspaper readership, while perceptions about crime in the local area seem to be more closely associated with the actual risk of victimisation: in particular, whether they have been a victim of crime in the last 12 months and the type of area in which they live. This reinforces the idea that people have more accurate knowledge of what is going on locally than nationally.

New questions in the 2008/09 BCS show that the local/national perception gap is particularly high for knife crime and gun crime.

*These differences in perceptions of individual crime types suggest that, for rarer crime types, where people's perceptions are less likely to be informed by personal experience, perceptions are more prone to being influenced by high profile events and media coverage<sup>80</sup>.*

In claiming an influence for the media, MORI point out this does not mean the public necessarily 'trust' the media as a source of information. In fact the evidence points in the opposite direction, with the public making clear distinctions between the trustworthiness of television news journalists, 'quality' papers and red-tops, and between the local and national press.

*People do treat the coverage in popular newspapers with caution, but exposure to them is high – much higher than more trusted sources such as direct communications from the police – and so their impact will be significant.*

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<sup>79</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin 19/07: *Attitudes, perceptions and risks of crime*, 2nd edition, Krista Jansson at al, November 2007.

<sup>80</sup> *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*, Home Office, July 2009

Earlier work by MORI<sup>81</sup> on how newspaper readership is related to views also found that although journalists and newspapers are not widely trusted, they have more influence than people may be aware of or willing to admit. Race/immigration and to a lesser extent crime were the two areas where MORI found evidence that newspapers have an independent influence, after controlling for variations in readership profile (such as people's political views).

Other work by MORI<sup>82</sup> attempted to tease out the factors that caused people to react to government information with 'unthinking, dismissive suspicion' as opposed to 'sophisticated, healthy scepticism'. Recorded crime and BCS were quoted by focus group participants as particular examples where government, opposition and media used discrepancies between the two sources to score points. MORI commented:

*This is an effective strategy to highlight legitimate issues of concern in the short-term, but in the long-term it helps reduce general levels of trust in all government information.*

In addition to the way politicians and the media take advantage of uncertainty to cherry-pick information, MORI highlighted factors such as 'misinformation overload' – referring to the way the internet and the variety of media outlets make it increasingly hard to tell fact from fiction.

MORI concluded that there is a need to ensure that information is seen to be beyond government influence and that its use is regulated and audited. They thought an independent national statistics service to produce and kitemark official statistics might help, but only if there were improved policing of the use of information. Their group discussions suggested that dissociation from government is what matters – but people realise that independence is not the same as objectivity.

MORI also referred to the changing role of the media, alleging that 'bitter and dismissive reporting' and blurring between reporting and comment formed part of the context in which government information is communicated. The Casey review team analysed a week's worth of newspaper coverage of crime in the Times and the Mirror in the first week of Oct 2007 and compared it with same week in 1967. Modern articles were found to be more opinionated, included more sensational language, and adopted a more critical and negative stance.

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81 *You are what you read? How newspaper readership is related to views*, Bobby Duffy and Laura Rowden, MORI Social Research Institute, undated. Findings based on over 10,000 interviews in 2004.

82 *Who do you believe? Trust in Government Information*, Bobby Duffy et al, MORI Social Research Institute, November 2005. Findings based on a review of previously published research and on five focus groups.

# Annex H: Recommendations from the interim report

An interim report from this review was published in December 2009, in order to stimulate discussion before finalising our recommendations. The interim recommendations are set out below. We also indicate, in square brackets, whether a similar or revised recommendation is contained in this final report.

1. The National Statistician should publish a regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This would set an authoritative benchmark for further professional analysis of these statistics. [Final recommendation 2]
2. The National Statistician, in conjunction with relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should consult users of statistics inside and outside government on proposals to develop the range of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system. [Amended form in final recommendation 3]
3. There should be independent and transparent oversight of the production of crime statistics, in order to maximise public confidence. [Amended form in final recommendation 1]
4. The National Statistician and the Home Office should produce a guide to the preferred sources of crime statistics, and guidelines on the presentation of crime statistics in all government documents and statements. [Final recommendation 4 ii) and 4 iii)]
5. In developing their advice to police forces on the conduct of local surveys, the Home Office and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) should include more guidance on the communication of statistical information from those surveys to the public. [Amended form in final recommendation 5 ii)]
6. The Home Office and/or the NPIA should continue to improve the online facilities for users of statistics to build tables, maps and charts on recorded crime and the Home Office should extend this facility to cover the BCS. [Replaced by final recommendation 5 i)]
7. The Home Office, Ministry of Justice and National Statistician should produce a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data. [Final recommendation 4 i)]
8. Supplementary indicators of trends in more serious crime (and possibly selected groups of offences) should be prepared for public consultation to see if they aid public understanding. [No longer an explicit recommendation]

It was noted that the final report of this review would also be examining:

- arrangements for the quality assurance of local data [final recommendation 6]
- plans for the dissemination of local and national performance information to the public [final recommendation 5 i)]
- crime-recording practice in other countries.

The interim recommendations were discussed at an open meeting in January 2010. The views expressed at the meeting (annex I), together with written comments on the report (annex J), were considered by the project board for the review, and subsequently by the UK Statistics Authority.

# Annex I: Note of open meeting held on 18 January 2010 at the Royal Statistical Society

## Speakers

Richard Laux	UK Statistics Authority
David Blunt & Julian Corner	Home Office
Iain Bell	Ministry of Justice
Richard Garside	Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, KCL
Allan Brimicombe	Crime and Justice Statistics Network
Paul Quinton	National Policing Improvement Agency

The meeting was chaired by Partha Dasgupta, a non-executive member of the UK Statistics Authority. The speakers' presentations were followed by a questions and answers session which included discussion of the recommendations in the interim report *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*

### **Recommendation 1: the National Statistician to publish a regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime**

This was generally welcomed by those present, although the resource implications were noted, and the fact that there isn't always a single or simple story to tell on crime. It was suggested that the National Statistician might commission the work from external specialists. It was also suggested that case studies at a local level might be more instructive than trying to agree a narrative at the national level.

Several participants spoke of a wider problem of distrust in society (reinforced by recent events such as MP expenses) so there was no guarantee that attempts to improve trust in crime statistics would be successful. The National Statistician had convened a working group on the presentation and dissemination of statistics: it was possible that more standardisation across the Government Statistical Service would help to build trust.

### **Recommendation 2: consultation on developing the range of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system**

This was welcomed, but with a strong plea for continuity in the data series. The Ministry of Justice has already started to introduce improvements and is planning a user guide to its statistics. More information is needed on flows through the criminal justice system.

**Recommendation 3: independent oversight of the production of national crime statistics**

This was also welcomed. No one present at the meeting argued in favour of transferring crime statistics from the Home Office, and it was pointed out that there have been improvements to statistical governance, both at the Home Office and more generally. It was noted, however, that although the user network was mostly against transferring the British Crime Survey from the Home Office, this was not a unanimous view. It might therefore be worth carrying out a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

**Recommendation 4: guide to preferred sources of data**

This proposal was welcomed. There was less support for the idea of a protocol on the responsible use of crime statistics: in addition to the practical issues mentioned in the report, it might be interpreted as an attempt to stifle comment or discourage new ways of analysing the data. The quality of crime statistics has improved over the years, but confidence has declined. It would not be easy to reverse public perceptions and it would be difficult to influence politicians and the media.

**Recommendation 5: guidance on the communication of statistical information at a local level**

This was welcomed. The user network felt that all downloadable data should be accompanied by ISO compliant metadata and that there should be standards in place for the compilation of local data. Local statistics needed to be contextualised because they often reflect operational decisions.

**Recommendation 6: improving online access to recorded crime and British Crime Survey data**

Research carried out during the development of the national crime-mapping website suggests that the public are most likely to access this kind of data when they have a specific purpose in mind (such as moving house), but that on the whole they prefer to receive information via newsletters. The National Policing Improvement Agency has commissioned a randomised control trial, in order to examine what impact these different ways of providing information have on public perceptions.

**Recommendation 7: conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data**

This was welcomed and deemed to be necessary, although it remains a long term goal.

**Recommendation 8: consultation on supplementary indicators of crime**

Some attendees felt this should be attempted, although it was noted that the task would be quite challenging, and that there had been limited feedback when the Home Office consulted on the subject. The work done to produce a crime indicator for the index of multiple deprivation might provide a starting point.

**Other points made by attendees at the meeting**

1. The report was considered to be balanced and the interim recommendations were broadly supported.
2. It was suggested that the report say more about how crime statistics can be used to benefit the public.
3. The true picture of crime recorded by the police is likely to be distorted where there are local pressures not to record crimes that have a low possibility of detection.
4. The number of definitions of 'violent' crime currently in use makes it easier for different interpretations and narratives to arise.
5. It was noted that reducing the notifiable list and focusing the statistics on serious crime would weaken continuity and make it more difficult to plan the resources required to cope with demands on the criminal justice system.

**Next steps**

Those present were reminded that written comments on the interim report would be very welcome (by the end of January). These would be considered by the project board for the review and by the UK Statistics Authority.

# Annex J: Responses to the interim report

Five written responses were received and were considered by the project board for the review. They have all given permission for their views to be published:

- Crime and Justice Statistics Network
- Home Office and Ministry of Justice (joint response from the Permanent Secretaries)
- Association of Chief Police Officers – Performance Management Business Area
- The Head of Information Governance at Bedfordshire Police
- Former Head of Profession for Statistics at the Home Office and author of the 2000 review of crime statistics (responding in a personal capacity)

## **Crime & Justice Statistics Network**

### **Response to**

### **UK Statistics Authority Monitoring Report 5, Interim Report Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales**

Submitted by Prof. Allan Brimicombe, Chair CJSN.

[a.j.brimicombe@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.j.brimicombe@uel.ac.uk)

Crime & Justice Statistics Network is a user group that operates under the auspices of the British Society of Criminology and is affiliated to the Royal Statistics Society Statistics User Forum. Its aims are to:

- provide an arena for debate about the production and publication of crime and justice statistics;
- engage with and consult with the key producers of governmental crime and justice statistics;
- work with the producers of crime and justice statistics to improve their quality and accessibility;
- work to improve public trust in crime and justice statistics, where such improvements of trust is warranted;
- support the proper interpretation of crime statistics;
- encourage greater analytic use of criminal justice statistics and surveys.

Overall the CJSN welcomes this report and agrees that the interim recommendations will improve the quality of crime statistics. The quality of crime statistics have greatly improved over the last couple of decades yet public confidence in them has greatly declined. There is therefore no guarantee that additional quality will result in added trust. Low public confidence in crime statistics and statistics in general in the UK has resulted more from the way politicians and the media have interpreted and 'spun' statistics for their own ends. The resulting perception of a credibility gap between the reported statistics and lived experience has been re-enforced by the plummeting public confidence in the political classes (viz. MP expenses). Together these give serious cause for concern for the effectiveness of our democratic institutions.

I. The National Statistician should publish a regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This would set an authoritative benchmark for further professional analysis of these statistics (paragraph 47).

This recommendation is supported. Having a credible independent commentary at the time of publication will help to reduce misrepresentation. However, in practical terms, the National Statistician would likely to have to recruit new staff on a fractional basis to meet with this responsibility. Perhaps these commentaries could be outsourced to appropriate specialist organisations/institutes. The national statistics and trends are often difficult to explain because they represent an aggregation of complexity. One approach might be to present case studies with local levels of explanation to illustrate 'what is happening', would more likely resonate with the public's lived experience and give the media the story it needs. To avoid any accusation of bias in the selection of case studies, a range of case studies could be prepared each year by the Home Office and the National Statistician decides which one to use in publications.

II. The National Statistician, in conjunction with relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should consult users of statistics inside and outside government on proposals to develop the range of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system (paragraphs 15-21).

This is supported as long as it does not risk adversely affecting the continuity of statistical publications making it harder to compile long-run data. The consultation should be widened to include systems for data collection/compilation and not just publications.

III. There should be independent and transparent oversight of the production of crime statistics, in order to maximise public confidence (paragraph 46).

We would agree with para. 26 that the Home Office continues to compile and manage the production of crime statistics. The use of a panel of independent experts would need to be *ex post* otherwise it runs into difficulties of prior disclosure. Nevertheless such a panel could evaluate/meta-evaluate, say on an annual basis, the production and content of publications to identify/reinforce best practice and provide formative feedback. The members of such a panel would need to be carefully considered to increase public confidence in the process.

IV. The National Statistician and the Home Office should produce a guide to the preferred sources of crime statistics, and guidelines on the presentation of crime statistics in all government documents and statements (paragraph 41)

We strongly support this recommendation. The guide should address both publications and sources of downloadable data (all of which should be provided with ISO compliant metadata) which are currently spread across a number of sites (in different recombinations). This should be extended to the Justice Ministry to provide a more integrated resource. Such a resource could be widely publicised.

V. In developing their advice to police forces on the conduct of local surveys, the Home Office and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) should include more guidance on the communication of statistical information from those surveys to the public (paragraph 27)

We support this particularly as it includes the conduct of local surveys/data compilation and presumably the processing of such data sets and not just final publications. Local data needs to be better contextualised in order to better understand/interpret the statistics since they are most likely to show the effects of operational decisions. There should be standards for this.

VI. The Home Office and/or the NPIA should continue to improve the online facilities for users of statistics to build tables, maps and charts on recorded crime and the Home Office should extend this facility to cover the BCS (paragraphs 19 and 27)

We also strongly support this recommendation. Online facilities should allow downloading of national or regional data sets at small area geographies (Ward, LSOA) rather than Ward by Ward as happens on the NPIA mapping site. The use of such sites should be monitored for important usage data that reflects where interest is.

VII. The Home Office, Ministry of Justice and National Statistician should produce a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data (paragraph 21)

We support this recommendation. Such a framework would need to be updated routinely as the measurement of crime develops to allow for changes due to the move to internet crime, and so on.

VIII. Supplementary indicators of trends in more serious crime (and possibly selected groups of offences) should be prepared for public consultation to see if they aid public understanding (paragraph 31)

We support this recommendation. It would be important to ensure that the use of these indicators is also monitored to see if public knowledge of these increases as well as public understanding.

#### Supplementary Points:

- We would encourage the UKSA to conduct further research into the causes of public distrust in official statistics and to monitor/analyse changes in public trust consequent on its initiatives.
- We would generally discourage any plan to move the BCS from the Home Office to ONS, although this is not a unanimous view. In order to resolve the arguments around this (which will tend to otherwise rumble on), and in the interests of both public trust and public expenditure, we would encourage the final report to recommend a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis of the British Crime Survey which would include consideration of: whether the current design of the BCS (including its scope, coverage and frequency) is fit for all its various purposes; whether different statistical needs, e.g. performance measurement, crime counting, attitude and opinion polling, are met most cost-effectively through its present design and format (or whether these might be met separately and/or in different ways); whether its present location in central government is the best to maximize its uses in the public interest (for which see the Statistics Commission review); and whether its conduct and management (including methodological review) is best located in the Home Office or elsewhere. In view of safeguarding the public interest (including the Exchequer), such an analysis should be conducted independently of its policy sponsors and commercial contractors, probably by ONS under UKSA scrutiny.
- It is not just crime statistics that need closer scrutiny by user groups. There are aspects of the data published by the Ministry of Justice that also need closer attention. For example, the reoffending data that is published only allows reconviction to be assessed across a fixed time period so inhibits analysis by time to reconviction or volume of reconvictions within the relevant time period. We do note however, that the Ministry of Justice has launched two consultations (just before Christmas) - one on the overall workplan for statistics for 2010-11 and a second on re-offending.
- A crime index and geocoding of crime: The crime domain in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, by LSOA) is fairly widely used in local government and elsewhere. It is composed of “the recorded crime for ... burglary, theft, criminal damage and violence – representing the risk of personal and material victimisation at a small area”. There are methodological problems in its national compilation and suffers from variability in geocoding. There is nevertheless a user’s requirement for a crime index that is more soundly produced for the IMD. Variability in practices and standards in the geocoding of crime across Forces do need to be evaluated and properly understood as this also feeds into the analysis of disaggregated data in NMIS data hub and in the preparation of data for Web-based neighbourhood mapping.
- We would encourage the final report to say something more about the handling of statistics in research and in performance management reports. In our view the important thing here is to ensure that researchers and statisticians have more authority to

challenge their policy colleagues. The UKSA strategy for National Statistics cannot readily be adapted to deal with publication of research and performance management statistics, which are more interwoven with the policy process and developed in a much more ad hoc way. The solution may be in strengthening the independent oversight provided by the Government Social Research Unit.



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**



**Sir David Normington KCB**  
**Permanent Secretary**  
**Home Office**  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

T 020 7035 0197  
F 0870 336 9037  
E davidnormington.submissions@  
homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

**Sir Michael Scholar**  
**UK Statistics Authority**  
**Statistics House**  
**Tredegar Park**  
**Cardiff Road**  
**Newport**  
**Gwent**  
**NP10 8XG**

**Sir Suma Chakrabarti KCB**  
**Permanent Secretary**  
**Ministry of Justice**  
102 Petty France  
London SW1H 9AJ

T 020 3334 3708  
F 020 3334 3710  
E psecretary1@justice.gsi.gov.uk

2 February 2010

*Dear Michael,*

**INTERIM REPORT**  
**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO TRUST IN CRIME STATISTICS**

We welcome the Authority's interim report on Overcoming barriers to trust in crime statistics published on 17 December 2009.

We are writing to endorse the comments made by David Blunt (Home Office Chief Statistician), Julian Corner (Head of the Crime Strategy Unit, Home Office) and Iain Bell (Ministry of Justice Chief Statistician) at the public meeting to discuss the interim report.

It is in everyone's interests that crime and criminal justice statistics are authoritative, timely, of high quality, relevant and trusted. They are a vital tool in enabling the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to achieve some of their key objectives, which include:

- helping people feel secure in their homes and communities;
- cutting crime, especially violent, drug and alcohol related crime;
- leading visible, responsive and accountable policing;
- protecting the public and reducing re-offending; and
- delivering a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public

We think the report is generally fair and well balanced. You acknowledge what we do well, what we have done to improve our statistics and highlighted areas that we could do better.

The report recognises the important changes the Home Office has made to the way statistics are managed and disseminated. These include creating the role of a Chief Statistician with direct line management responsibility for all the Home Office statistical teams and accountability to the National Statistician on professional matters. The Home Office statisticians now hold independent press conferences at a neutral venue, chaired by the National Statistician.

The Ministry of Justice has also recently made similar organisational changes with a new Chief Statistician post having direct line management responsibility for Ministry of Justice statisticians and similar accountability to the National Statistician on professional matters.

Like other departments, National Statistics publications are all now accessible through the central publication hub and more of our datasets are now available electronically (e.g. police recorded crime aggregates at force level). We recognise these organisational and output changes are, however, changes that only a few see and is not likely to have much impact upon broader public opinion which is why we welcome your recognition of our changes.

Your report recognises that the quality of our outputs "compare well with other countries"; that there is "no evidence of political interference in the production of the aggregate National Statistics on crime" and that the Authority "are satisfied that the Home Office statisticians responsible for this work are fully committed to maintaining that integrity".

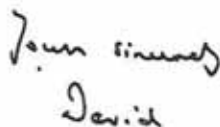
Turning to the recommendations themselves, we are broadly content with these subject to further negotiations with both the Authority and the National Statistician. We particularly note your initial conclusion "that crime statistics should continue to be compiled and managed by the Home Office", and welcome your balanced analysis in reaching this conclusion. The crime statistics are central to the effectiveness of the response to crime, and this is currently driven by the collaboration between independent statisticians, policy leads and police colleagues. The statisticians introduce a level of rigour and expertise into policy development that it would otherwise be very hard to replicate. This allows us to understand readily the statistical significance of the data we are dealing with, to identify the emergence of trends and sub-trends and to quality assure our own use of statistics. The British Crime Survey remains a uniquely valued research tool, which has provided a rich evidence base for policy development, and it has evolved out of a great deal of joint work between statisticians and Home Office colleagues on priority issues for investigation. If this were to be revisited at any future time it would be important to revisit your suggested questions:-

- Will any change enhance public confidence in the statistics?
- Will it maintain statistical quality and retain expertise?
- Will it ensure continued Home Office access to the datasets for operational purposes?
- Will it offer the best value for money?

We attach an annex with our initial observations on the eight draft recommendations that you have sought views on.

When considering the recommendations we need to bear in mind the resources involved in implementation and evidence that the recommendations are likely to achieve a successful improvement in trust.

To end with public interest, this will only be served if the crime and criminal justice debates are underpinned by statistics that we can all sign up to, crucially including the public's representatives in the media and in Parliament. If it is the case that the barriers that remain to trust are caused by how the statistics are communicated and used, rather than how they are produced, then we need to be sure that any resulting changes will genuinely cut through to public perception. As such, we need to fully understand what the public want from crime statistics and what are their barriers to trust in them.



**SIR DAVID NORMINGTON**



**SIR SUMA CHAKRABARTI**

## ANNEX

### Interim review recommendations and initial Home Office responses

**1. The National Statistician should publish a regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This would set an authoritative benchmark for further professional analysis of these statistics (paragraph 47).**

We welcome the interim report finding that the UK Statistics Authority have seen no evidence of political interference in the production of crime statistics and are satisfied that Home Office statisticians responsible for this work are fully committed to maintaining their integrity. We would, however, welcome the statisticians working with the National Statistician to establish new collaborative arrangements for the production of regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This could build on the initiative, in which Home Office statisticians have collaborated with statisticians in other departments, to produce a single National Statistician's report on Migration Statistics which brings statistics from across the Government Statistical Service together in a single authoritative publication.

**2. The National Statistician, in conjunction with relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should consult users of statistics inside and outside government on proposals to develop the range of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system (paragraphs 15-21).**

We would support further work being done to develop the range of statistical publications. Our statisticians would be available to work with the National Statistician on such consultations

The Ministry of Justice has already opened its annual consultation on the statistical workplan for 2010-11 and brought forward several proposals to help meet this agenda as it has been recognised that while many detailed statistics are published relating to the Criminal Justice System, these are presented across a range of publications and could benefit from being presented more coherently. The Home Office is similarly preparing its annual consultation on its statistical workplan.

Ministry of Justice proposes to introduce a quarterly version of its Criminal Statistics publication and to consult with users about presenting this as a coherent overview across the Criminal Justice System. This would also allow much better comparisons of flows through the Criminal justice system and Home Office crime data

**3. There should be independent and transparent oversight of the production of crime statistics, in order to maximise public confidence (paragraph 46)**

The Home Office has already taken steps to ensure that crime statistics are produced without any political interference, with the Chief Statistician now reporting direct to the Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor and on professional matters to the National Statistician. We would again wish to explore with the UK Statistics Authority and the National Statistician how we might in practical terms establish further transparency and independence in the oversight of crime statistics.

**4. The National Statistician and the Home Office should produce a guide to the preferred sources of crime statistics and guidelines on the presentation of crime statistics in all government documents and statements (paragraph 41)**

The Home Office annual crime statistics publication seeks to indicate the weight that should be placed on the different sources of crime statistics and would welcome working with the National Statistician to develop a more explicit guide to preferred sources and guidelines on presentation to further build on the work already undertaken.

**5. In developing their advice to police forces on the conduct of local surveys, the Home Office and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) should include more guidance on the communication of statistical information from those surveys to the public (paragraph 27)**

Home Office statisticians are already working closely with the NPIA (via the local surveys Technical Advisory Group) to develop a 'minimum publication requirement' for local surveys which provides guidelines on how the data should be made available and communicated to the general public. We will feed into a forthcoming practitioner event being hosted by the NPIA which will focus on best practice in using and communicating survey data.

**6. The Home Office and/or the NPIA should continue to improve the online facilities for users of statistics to build tables, maps and charts on recorded crime and the Home Office should extend this facility to cover the BCS (paragraphs 19 and 27)**

We accept that the systems for presenting statistics online need to be under continuing review given the growing importance of this media for giving access to the data for the public and more specialist users. We are committed to making more of our public data publicly available, including the BCS, and within available resources providing more access to data.

**7. The Home Office, Ministry of Justice and National Statistician should produce a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data (paragraph 21)**

We see this recommendation as underpinning the development of an explicit guide to preferred sources (recommendation 4). This will build on the Ministry of Justice's ongoing work to establish better linkages between CJS statistics should also serve to produce a better conceptual framework for understanding crime and CJS statistics.

**8. Supplementary indicators of trends in more serious crime (and possibly selected groups of offences) should be prepared for public consultation to see if they aid public understanding (paragraph 31)**

We will explore with the UK Statistics Authority and the National Statistician as to how this recommendation could be best taken forward. There was a previous consultation where there was little enthusiasm for a weighted crime measure and we would see the involvement of users and other stakeholders as being key to taking forward a well informing public consultation on supplementary indicators.

**From the office of Assistant Chief Constable Crime & Operations**

Jill Barelli  
Monitoring and Assessment Team  
UK Statistics Authority  
SA/13, Statistics House  
Myddelton St  
London EC1R 1UW

Direct Line: 01785 232120  
Fax: 01785 232412  
Our Ref: DP/JAB

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Dear Jill

**Interim Report of the UK Statistic Authority on Confidence in Crime Statistics**

Thank you for forwarding a copy of the Interim Report from the UK Statistics Authority. I am pleased to be able to provide a response on behalf of the ACPO Performance Management Business Area (PMBA).

In line with our original discussion during the course of the preparation of your report, ACPO PMBA holds the view that the whole process of recording, collating and then using official crime related statistics needs to be the subject of a significant overhaul. In terms of the specific interim recommendations from your report we would agree that national statistics need to be presented and disseminated in a way which provides a fully informed commentary for the public, thereby allowing them to make conclusions on issues affecting society and even the efficacy of Government policy and the efforts of public services generally to tackle the issues that matter most to communities.

Police recorded crime is only a portion of the overall crime experienced by the public. The British Crime Survey is by no means sufficient to conduct crime pattern analysis at a local level but it is one of the few methodologies used over some decades to identify overall trends and patterns. It has been consistently shown that police recorded crime amounts to only around half of all of the crime which could be extrapolated from BC surveys. In the past the public could understandably view the presentation of recorded crime and BCS as being in conflict whereas any good analyst would use the two data sets and anything else available for the purposes of triangulation, thereby allowing a much more rounded and compelling narrative.

Regrettably however it remains the case that crime statistics can have the appearance of undermining the BCS and presenting recorded crime as the most valid indicator of police performance and government strategy. Ironically, in many crime types, the proportion of overall crime reported to the police could be viewed as a measure of confidence in policing rather than upward trends signifying a deteriorating situation for communities.

In recent discussions with the Home Office, Chief Constable Keith Bristow, as Head of the Crime Business Area, has driven home the point that all of these data sets have a primary purpose in directing government strategy and the use of

public resources towards tackling risk and harm. It could be argued that comprehensive area assessments facilitate the focus of the debate on whether or not public money as a whole has been spent in a way which provides most value for local communities.

Coming to a point of detail, ACPO PMBA still maintains that the violent crime legislative framework is still very much out of date. The range of offences are too varied and too complex, overall leading to a position where the prosecution options do not necessarily tie in very well with the changing nature of violent criminality within our society. The complex and, therefore fragile, nature of the legislation is leading to far too many changes in the Home Office Counting Rules as the old legislation is manipulated in an effort to shed some light on strategic and policy options. We also have an increasingly questionable attempt to marry up police crime reports with the CPS Charging Standards. Perhaps it is time to recognise that these are two entirely different decision making processes and that the National Crime Recording Standards have their true strength in describing, in reasonably straight forward terms the description of a victim's experiences. The Charging Standards are probably best left with the Crown Prosecution Service to address the more subtle areas of public interest, aggravating and mitigating factors as well as the intricacies of deciding on the realistic prospect of conviction. Some interesting early discussions have begun within the police service to assemble a very lean framework for recording violent crime. I hope these discussions can continue and I will make sure the UK Statistics Authority have a vital opportunity to influence the early discussions.

Finally turning to the initial recommendations my comments and observations are as follows (see page 14 of Interim Report).

- I. We would agree that the National Statistician should publish a regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This however must be a rounded commentary drawing widely upon the available data sets, thereby providing the public with the balanced set of conclusions.
- II. ACPO agree that consultation is therefore needed to build upon the range of statistical publications on crime and very importantly the wider Criminal Justice system.
- III. We would agree that independent, transparent and consistent oversight of the production and use of national crime statistics will be important in the link to public confidence.
- IV. Guidance from the National Statistician and the Home Office, having formalised items i – iii, would indeed be useful.
- V. We agree that the service needs to provide maximum rigor to the use of local statistics and survey based information. I have already begun discussions with the Home Office, however, further advice and guidance from the UK Statistics Authority in this regard would be extremely welcome.
- VI. At present I am unaware of any deficiencies within the current or planned arrangements for public access to crime mapping.
- VII. Link to item ii – I would agree that a broader framework for crime and Criminal Justice data leading to a wider commentary on efforts to reduce criminality as a service wide issue would be welcomed.
- VIII. A focus on more serious crime commentary at a national level maybe welcomed by the public and could pave the way for the police service

and its partners to work with communities at a local level on the issues that most matter to them. In effect, serious crime, once agreed, would become the national priorities driving government strategy and the local issues would be subject to judgements through comprehensive area assessments.

Thank you again for providing ACPO PMBA the opportunity to respond to the interim report. Overall my view is that the recommendations generally point in the right direction, however, I think it is increasingly obvious that the changes required may need to be more far reaching and fundamental than those contained within the above recommendations.

I will be very pleased to discuss the content of this letter and indeed contribute to your final report at your convenience.

Yours sincerely



Douglas Paxton  
Assistant Chief Constable

Copy to: Commander Paul Minton, Staff Officer to ACPO President  
Chief Constable Steve Finnigan, Lancashire Police, Chair of ACPO  
Performance Management Business Area  
Chief Constable Keith Bristow, Warwickshire Police, Chair,  
Crime Business Area

sarah.hands@staffordshire.pnn.police.uk  
Staffordshire Police,  
Cannock Road, Stafford, ST17 0QG

**catherine.bowen-  
walker@Bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk**

05/02/2010 09:11

To:Authority Consultations@ONS

cc:

Subject:Overcoming barriers to trust in crime statistics

Dear Sir(s)

Whilst I understand and support the approach being taken within the interim recommendations to provide a more cohesive approach to the formal publication of statistical crime data and go some way to improving the way in which crime statistics are quoted inside and outside of Government the report fails to take into account the Freedom of Information Act and its potential impact on what outcome.

The publication of crime data is only one part of the story because, as you are aware, requests under FOIA have to be answered in accordance to that request and these rarely follow any format and it is disappointing that this is not even recognised. Formalising the publication of official statistical data has great benefits, but the FOIA experience shows that requests and the press particularly, want to delve deeper into that data and can be quite specific in what they ask, consequently this can sometimes *appear* to skew the statistics to maximise their headline. This is particularly the case where there are changes in the local environment such as boundary / post code changes and nationally such as counting rules.

Crime statistics that are published under FOIA are still official statistics, although they may not accord to the format proposed. This needs to be recognised within the report to prevent any confusion.

Mrs A. C. Bowen-Walker  
Head of Information Governance  
01234 842170

Jon Simmons  
168 Elm Grove  
Brighton  
BN2 3DA  
[mail@jonsimmons.com](mailto:mail@jonsimmons.com)

5<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Sir Michael Scholar  
UK Statistics Authority  
Statistics House  
Tredegar Park  
Newport  
South Wales  
NP10 8XG

Dear Sir Michael,

**Overcoming barriers to trust in crime statistics - consultation**

I am writing in a personal capacity, as the former head of profession for statistics at the Home Office, and the person responsible for the 2000 Review of Crime Statistics and then overseeing the Crime Statistics from 2001 through to 2007. I was very pleased to be able to attend the Open Meeting at the RSS on 18<sup>th</sup> January to discuss the interim report on trust, but following that meeting I felt it would be useful to write to comment on three specific issues raised in the discussion that followed the presentations.

*Would presenting statistics of the flows through the criminal justice system help to build trust?*

There seemed to be some agreement that presenting a picture of the outcomes and linking records through the criminal justice process would help to improve trust in the data. From my own perspective I believe this view to be wrong, and whilst conceptually attractive, given the inherent nature of the crime statistics and data on courts and offenders statistics on such flows can significantly misrepresent the reality to the public, and in doing so will undermine public confidence more than they will restore it. That does not mean that nothing should be attempted, but the presentation of any such data needs to be very clear in stating what exactly is being described, and what is not.

Technically, whilst it may be attractive to try to establish how many crimes result in an offender being brought to justice I do not think such statistics succeed in doing 'what they say on the tin'. For example, if one takes one hundred burglaries, it is possible to suggest that – given the number of sanction detections – roughly one in seven of these lead to an arrest of the burglar. For offences of rape, the statistics suggest one in four are cleared up. Such statistics are however deeply misleading. For a detected offence of this sort, it is extremely likely that the detected offender is also responsible for a large volume of those offences which remain recorded as undetected. A rapist who is charged for a series of specific offences, which have been thereby recorded as 'detected' may be responsible for many others which are not known and which cannot be linked to that individual. Put another way, if a burglar is caught red-handed having committed 100 burglaries, but only admits to the last ten, is that a 10% clear up rate or 100%? Linking clear-ups is an expensive business and does not justify the cost. The result of crude analysis, however, is statistics which suggest the criminal justice system is weak in catching criminals where that may not in fact be the case.

*Would there be benefit in dropping minor crimes and ASB from the notifiable list of offences which the police are asked to record?*

At the open meeting, there were strong arguments made for retaining the current extensive list of notifiable offences, in spite of recognition that this list contains a lot of relatively minor offences whose number could grossly mislead the public in relation to the extent of serious crime. In general, the views of contributors to the discussion seemed to favour capturing this data because, whilst there were acknowledged presentational risks, there were significant benefits in having the fullest array of data on which to base our understanding of local crime problems and therefore to address them.

In general, I would agree with this view, but would shade this view slightly. Currently, the presentation of the notifiable statistics fails to fully recognise the tension in this process, and presents both minor and major crimes in the same way, allowing these to be added together to present a nonsensical figure of 'total crime'. This compilation also confuses reasonably robust measures of the general public's experience of crime (demand-led measures, where the count is primarily based on incontrovertible criminal acts, such as murder, or crimes brought to the attention of the police by the public, such as burglary) and another set of crimes that will be highly responsive to police activity or policies seeking to address them (and therefore perhaps should be seen as activity measures rather than measures of a level of crime, drug offences and minor disorder being the classic examples).

A couple of suggestions flow from this analysis.

Firstly, the proposal to create an index of crime (unweighted) which presents a small subset of key crimes that are of a demand-led nature, and where recording and reporting is believed to be clear and robust, would provide a much more reliable indicator of trend. When this was trialled by Home Office statisticians (see, 'Crime in England and Wales 2006-7' page 30), such an index also seemed to mirror the BCS trends over the long-term, which suggests it would provide a more coherent presentation of the two measures of crime and one which would be less confusing for the public.

Secondly, the presentation of crime data needs to reflect very clearly these differences in the nature of these statistics, and the consequential implications for further analysis of the data, such as to show trends. Low-level offences would be better termed 'incidents' and published in a separate table, to ensure there is greater clarity for the casual statistic user. This would ensure that the full range of data was still collected and available, but there was clarity in how it might be interpreted.

*What role does the media play in undermining or contributing to trust in crime statistics?*

Sometimes the media's reporting of crime statistics can be misleading and dwell on the negative story rather than the positive; and the media have also been slow to pick up on the recording changes which impacted on the police statistics even though the impact of the changes was clearly stated by the Home Office statisticians and thoroughly evaluated after their introduction (under my personal leadership, see: Simmons et al 'National Crime Recording Standard: An analysis of the impact on recorded crime (2003)' and also 'Crime in England and Wales 2006-7 Fig 2.11 on page 27). However, whilst it is tempting to criticise media reporting, and sometimes with justification, some of the misreporting is due to the inherent nature of the modern media and the way in which crime comes to public attention (as well as its presentation, as already commented on above). These features of modern media reporting that are inherent in the nature of crime can work to undermine public confidence in the CJS and thereby trust in the statistics.

For example, whereas in the old days a court reporter would write a crime story based on sitting in a court room where the tale of the crime would be told, accompanied by knowledge of the fact that the criminal had been caught, tried and found guilty - now, the speed and breadth of information means crime is reported when it occurs, when the system has had no chance to apprehend the offender, and therefore the complete story is not known. This lack of 'closure'

inherent in the way in which crime comes to the public's attention undermines public confidence in the system. This appears to be much more of a problem for national media than local, where court reporting and a closer relationship to local police and courts will sometimes provide greater coverage of successful detections and prosecutions.

Furthermore, there are enough serious crimes, murders say, to provide a headline in the newspapers every single day of the year. No matter the significant reductions in crime generally, and in recent years homicides also, this understandable focus on serious crime will tend to give the impression of an unchanging blanket of horror - and affects the public psyche. Rarely are such crimes placed in context for the above reasons - the reports occur when the crime is discovered not usually when the responsible criminal is apprehended; and they are rarely placed in the context provided by the longer-term trend in such crimes, or by comparison with other countries.

The impact of rare but serious events is very starkly illustrated by the recent study <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8497277.stm> on child deaths, which are a matter of serious public concern whenever they occur, but where there has been significant progress evidenced by statistics over recent decades. This study should be praised for its well-evidenced treatment of a serious and disturbing matter placed in an appropriate context, and thereby providing some reassurance as to both the real risk to the public and also the achievements of public services in an extremely challenging area.

With kind regards,

Jon Simmons

*Former Head of Crime Statistics at the Home Office (2001-7)*

