

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Crime in England and Wales

(produced by the Office for National Statistics)

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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. It is also 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.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

Contents

Section 1: Summary of findings

Section 2: Subject of the assessment

Section 3: Assessment findings

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

Annex 4: Summary of Requirements from Assessment report 102

1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act gives the Statistics Authority power to re-assess whether the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³ continues to be complied with in relation to official statistics already designated as National Statistics. The report covers the set of statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and reported in:
- *Crime in England and Wales*⁴ (*Crime*)
 - *Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences*⁵ (*Violent Crime*)
 - *Focus on Public Perceptions of Policing, Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales*⁶ (*Perceptions*)
 - *Focus on Property Crime*⁷ (*Property Crime*)
 - Other 'Focus on' topic-based statistical reports related to crime statistics (forthcoming)
- 1.1.2 The previous assessment of these sets of statistics was reported in Assessment report 102⁸ published in April 2011. They have been prioritised for re-assessment partly due to the high profile nature of concerns raised recently about some aspects of the police's recording of crime data, and partly reflecting the fact that responsibility for the production of the statistics transferred from the Home Office to ONS in April 2012. This is discussed further in section 2 and annex 4.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Assessment Committee on behalf of the Board of the Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority notes that while ONS is responsible for the production and publication of crime statistics (including the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)), the Home Office is responsible for the collection and validation of recorded crime data from police forces. Police forces carry out internal audits of their recorded crime data. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-march-2013/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-violent-crime/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-public-perceptions-of-policing--findings-from-the-2011-12-crime-survey-for-england-and-wales/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-property-crime--2011-12/index.html>

⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-102---crime-statistics-in-england-and-wales.pdf>

Constabulary's (HMIC) independent assessments of police forces can include inspections of recorded crime data and the practices of recording them.

1.2.2 This report concludes that further evidence has emerged in relation to recorded crime data which raises questions about ongoing compliance with the *Code of Practice*, and about the extent of ongoing compliance in relation to some of the Requirements made in Assessment report 102.

1.2.3 The Authority notes:

- that there is accumulating evidence that suggests the underlying data on crimes recorded by the police may not be reliable. This evidence includes HMIC assessments of data recording practices (para 3.15 of this report);
- ONS's own report, in January 2013, which raised concerns that the degree of compliance with the standards for police crime recording may be falling (para 3.7); and
- high profile concerns raised at the Public Administration Select Committee and the Home Affairs Select Committee (para 3.7).

1.2.4 The Authority also considers that ONS does not have sufficient information about the quality of recorded crime data⁹ to:

- provide assurance that the statistics based on these data meet users' needs; and
- ensure that users are made fully aware of the limitations of the recorded crime statistics and the impact that these have on their use of the statistics.

The Authority further considers that ONS will not be able to gather the information it needs to inform these considerations in the usual period allowed for meeting requirements from Assessments.

1.2.5 Therefore, the Authority has removed the National Statistics designation from statistics based on recorded crime data¹⁰ until such time that ONS, working with the Home Office, HMIC or other appropriate bodies, is able to demonstrate that the quality of the underlying data, and the robustness of the ongoing audit and quality assurance procedures, are sufficient to support its production of statistics based on recorded crime data to a level of quality that meets users' needs. This is discussed further in section 3.

1.2.6 The Statistics Authority confirms that crime statistics which are based on sources other than recorded crime data and which are included in the products listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the relevant enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by April 2014. These statistical products may themselves carry the National Statistics logo, but ONS should make clear in its crime statistics reports that statistics based on recorded crime data have been de-

⁹ That is, crime data supplied by police forces and Action Fraud (run by the National Fraud Authority) to the Home Office.

¹⁰ See footnote 9

designated as National Statistics, and include a reference to this Assessment report.

- 1.2.7 ONS has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 ONS does not have sufficient knowledge of (and therefore does not publish enough information about) the processes involved in the recording of crime by police forces and the checks carried out on the data received from police forces, to be assured that they are accurately recorded. It does not provide enough information to users about the quality of the statistics – most importantly the accuracy and reliability of the statistics.
- 1.3.2 ONS invites feedback from users in its reports and gives presentations to some user groups about changes to, or issues with, crime statistics. However it has not collected sufficiently detailed information about users' needs to be able to provide assurance that the statistics it publishes within reports about crime meet users' needs. It has not documented the full range of uses and does not keep published information about users' views of the statistics up to date.
- 1.3.3 The commentary in the statistical reports about crime includes some helpful information to users about interpreting changes and trends in the statistics, and provides some context and explanations for the main findings. ONS has published a series of analytical papers to support the crime statistics reports, including an analysis of variation in crime trends. ONS recently improved the signposting of some related statistics on its website. The full range of documents relating to statistics about crime is not easily accessible from ONS's website, although some improvements have been made over recent months.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.
- 1.4.2 In respect of the removal of the National Statistics designation from the statistics based on recorded crime data, the Authority will review the status of the statistics when ONS has further information about the quality of these data, and the full range of user needs. Following the receipt of further information, the Statistics Authority proposes to conduct a new re-assessment of crime statistics in England and Wales.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- Requirement 1** Extend the published information about uses of crime statistics and users' needs in relation to the statistics (para 3.4).
- Requirement 2** Provide more information to users about the nature and extent of changes made to police records, and how to interpret changes in the published crime statistics from one reference period to another (para 3.6).
- Requirement 3** Publish information about the roles and responsibilities of the departments involved in the production and publication of crime statistics (para 3.8).
- Requirement 4** Explain more fully how all the administrative data sources are used to produce statistics about crime (para 3.9).
- Requirement 5** a) Publish further detail about the processes used by police forces in updating and submitting data and by the Home Office in validating the data; b) collect information from the Home Office about the quality of the data received from police forces; c) consider the implications of this information for the production of statistics of a quality that meet users' needs; and d) reflect this within the published quality information for users (para 3.11).
- Requirement 6** Improve, and make more accessible, information about all aspects of the quality of crime statistics and the impact on their use (para 3.13).
- Requirement 7** a) Keep users informed about the progress of the HMIC audit; b) review published quality information in the light of the findings of the audit; and c) consider whether statistics based on police recorded crime data can be produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, taking into account information gathered in the course of meeting this report's Requirements (para 3.16).
- Requirement 8** Publish, or clearly link to, information about the changes in the CSEW sample size and response rate over time and the impact of these changes on the quality of the statistics (para 3.17).

Requirement 9	Work with the Home Office to publish information for users about police forces' progress in switching to use of the Data Hub, and the reason why this has taken so long (para 3.21).
Requirement 10	Review the staffing profile of the crime statistics team with a view to providing assurance that it remains sufficiently resourced (para 3.24).
Requirement 11	Review the content of statistical reports about crime, taking into account the information gathered in the course of addressing this report's recommendations. In doing this, consider: a) whether the differences in recording practices across police forces are such that they have an impact on the suitability of presenting statistics at a <i>national</i> level for recorded crime; and b) the extent of user demand for a measure of reported crime derived from police administrative systems (para 3.26).
Requirement 12	Publish more detailed contextual information to explain the impact on the published statistics of the full range of possible actions that can be taken by members of the public, police and other organisations following either being a victim of a crime, observing a crime or receiving a report of a crime (para 3.27).
Requirement 13	Improve the accessibility of the crime statistics on the ONS website and publish information about the relationship between the crime statistics and other related statistics produced across the criminal justice system (para 3.28).
Requirement 14	Provide guidance about the uses and purposes of the various statistics available about crime based on police data, and explain the distinct purpose of ONS statistics based on police recorded crime data (para 3.29).
Requirement 15	Ensure that pre-release access for <i>Crime</i> is only granted where absolutely necessary (para 3.32).
Requirement 16	Add the Homicide Index dataset to the Statement of Administrative Sources and include in the Statement information about the arrangements for auditing the quality of all the administrative data used to produce statistics about crime (para 3.33).

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 Crime statistics published by ONS are derived from a range of survey and administrative data sources. The two key data sources – police recorded crime and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) – are supplemented by a number of other data sources. Information about these sources is presented in this section.

Police recorded crime

- 2.2 The extent and nature of crime in England and Wales is difficult to measure accurately. Various factors affect how a crime is recorded by the police after being reported. Not all crimes are *reported to the police* – *police recorded crime* is a subset of reported crime, which is itself a subset of *total crime*. The recording of incidents and crimes by the police should follow the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime¹¹ (HOCR) and National Crime Recording Standard¹² (NCRS). The rules and guidance cover how crimes should be categorised, and whether or not a reported incident should be considered a crime, a crime related incident (CRI) or another type of incident.
- 2.3 Each police force has its own force crime registrar, who is responsible for overseeing compliance with HOCR and NCRS, and who is the final arbiter for whether a force should record a crime or make a ‘no-crime’ decision (reverse the decision that an incident was a crime). As set out in HOCR, force crime registrars should conduct audits of recording practices within their force. In the past HMIC has conducted independent inspections of all forces within England and Wales; where these include aspects of crime recording they usually include audits that investigate matters such as: the appropriateness of decisions about whether an incident is a crime or not; whether crimes have been accurately categorised; and the reasons for any deviation from the rules and standards. HMIC is carrying out a full inspection of police crime data integrity and is due to report in 2014¹³.
- 2.4 There are a number of ways that crimes can be reported to the police, for example: by victims reporting crimes in person at a police station, online or by telephone; by police identifying a crime themselves; or by a report from another agency such as social services. In many, but not all, cases a crime record will start out as an incident record which allows the police to assess the facts around the matter reported to them and determine whether a crime has been committed. However, in some cases the crime record may be created directly, without initially creating an incident report. Another variation between police forces is that some have an integrated incident and crime recording system, whereas others have separate systems. These differences present challenges in providing assurance that the recording processes are audited systematically and consistently.
- 2.5 Police recorded crime data are supplied to the Home Office by the 43 police forces in England and Wales, plus the British Transport Police. The data cover

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counting-rules-for-recorded-crime>

¹² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116269/ncrs.pdf

¹³ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/programmes/crime-data-integrity/>

'notifiable' offences – those of sufficient seriousness that they either must, or could, be tried in a Crown Court (though many may be dealt with at magistrates' courts) and a small number which can only be heard by magistrates. These data are taken from police forces' crime recording systems.

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

2.6 The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) measures individuals' experience of crime – victimisation – in the previous twelve months. The survey provides the opportunity to collect information about crime independently of whether it has been reported to, or recorded by, the police. It was formerly known as the British Crime Survey and renamed in April 2012 to better reflect the coverage, as a separate survey is carried out in Scotland by the Scottish Government. The survey also asks about attitudes to the criminal justice system including about the police and courts, individuals' perceptions and experience of anti-social behaviour, and about some types of fraud. It does not include crimes against businesses or 'victimless' crimes such as possession of drugs. Since 2009 the CSEW has included a separate set of questions to record the experiences of young people aged 10-15. The CSEW fieldwork and initial data preparation is contracted out by ONS and the contract is currently held by TNS BMRB¹⁴.

Responsibility for crime statistics

2.7 Until April 2012 the collation, analysis and publication of crime statistics for England and Wales was the responsibility of the Home Office; these statistics were assessed in Assessment report 102¹⁵ published in April 2011. In May 2010 the Statistics Authority published a Monitoring report *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*¹⁶ which built upon the work published in previous reports and further noted the lack of public trust in crime statistics. These reports included recommendations relating to the evaluation and reporting of the quality of recorded crime statistics. In January 2011 the Home Office announced¹⁷ that responsibility for the publication of crime statistics would move from the Home Office to an independent body, and requested that the National Statistician carry out an independent review of the collection and publication of crime statistics, to include a recommendation about which organisation should produce the crime statistics. The National Statistician's Review¹⁸ concluded that responsibility for the publication of crime statistics should move from the Home Office to ONS.

2.8 Since April 2012, ONS has been responsible for CSEW; the Home Office is responsible for collating and quality assuring the recorded crime data and passing the validated data to ONS on a quarterly basis for analysis and publication.

¹⁴ <http://www.tns-bmrb.co.uk/>

¹⁵ See footnote 8

¹⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reports/index.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/crime-statistics-review-launched>

¹⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-reviews/national-statistician-s-review-of-crime-statistics.html>

- 2.9 Some elements of crime statistics assessed in Assessment report 102 (published in April 2011) remain the responsibility of the Home Office. For example, the Home Office publishes statistics¹⁹ about the number and types of crimes detected in England and Wales. In addition, although the responsibility for CSEW moved to ONS, the Home Office retains responsibility for analysis and publication of *Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2012/13 Crime Survey for England and Wales*²⁰. (The Home Office is also responsible for the Commercial Victimisation Survey, as noted below.)
- 2.10 ONS supplements the two main sources of information about crime with a range of other data sources:
- In addition to the monthly return, police forces supply a more detailed statistical return for each homicide (murders, manslaughters and infanticides) recorded in their force area to the Home Office. These returns are used to populate the Home Office database called the Homicide Index²¹, and ONS uses this detail as part of *Violent Crime*.
 - The Home Office collects additional data from police forces about offences involving knives and sharp instruments, which are not part of the monthly aggregate return. Comparable data are available only from 2008/09 due to changes in coverage and issues relating to HOCR for grievous bodily harm with intent²². Police forces also complete separate returns for offences involving firearms.
 - The National Statistician's Review noted that fraud was not adequately counted in the CSEW or by police recorded crime data and called for further sources to be considered. In response to this ONS now presents statistics in its crime reports based on two further sources of data about fraud, in order to present a fuller picture: data collated by both Action Fraud²³ and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau²⁴ (NFIB). As of 1 April 2013 Action Fraud records fraud reported by members of the public on behalf of police forces.
 - NFIB collates data about industry fraud from CIFAS²⁵ (The UK's Fraud Prevention Service) and Financial Fraud Action UK²⁶ (which collates information from the card payments industry) in order to identify investigatory opportunities. ONS notes that there is not a consistent approach across industry bodies in the recording of fraud data and in previous reports has labelled these as non-National Statistics. During the course of this Assessment ONS told us that it has reviewed these data sources and for future releases will include them only as contextual information. We understand that ONS is giving further consideration to the future presentation of industry fraud statistics.

¹⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224037/hosb0213.pdf

²⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225122/Drugs_Misuse_201213.pdf

²¹ More information about the Homicide Index is published in *Violent Crime*. See Footnote 5

²² The Crime Statistics User Guide provides a link to further information about this issue

²³ <http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

²⁴ <http://www.cityoflondon.police.uk/CityPolice/Departments/ECD/NFIB/>

²⁵ <http://www.cifas.org.uk/>

²⁶ <http://www.financialfraudaction.org.uk/>

- Police forces record information about anti-social behaviour incidents, which ONS presents (alongside information about perceptions of anti-social behaviour collected using CSEW). Anti-social behaviour incidents are not recorded as part of the main police recorded crime collection, since they are non-notifiable offences. ONS notes that an HMIC review²⁷ found that there was a wide variation in the quality of decision making associated with the recording of anti-social behaviour. ONS labels these as non-National statistics.
- The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) provides ONS with information about other non-notifiable crimes not covered by police recorded crime. These are published as National Statistics by MoJ²⁸.
- The Commercial Victimization Survey²⁹ is carried out by the Home Office and provides details about crime in the business sector. The Home Office publishes statistics from the Commercial Victimization Survey as official statistics. The Authority will consider whether to invite the relevant Minister to request that these statistics be assessed against the Code of Practice.

Statistical reports about crime

- 2.11 ONS produces a quarterly report and three annual topic-based ‘focus on’ reports. The topic of two of the ‘focus on’ reports listed below is the same each year with consistent data tables made available for users, although the exact content will change each year. The third ‘focus on’ report could change in content each year.
- *Crime in England and Wales (Crime)* is a quarterly report. It presents statistics for the previous 12 months from a wide range of sources including the CSEW and police recorded crime. It provides analyses of trends in recorded crimes by each type of offence and provides overall crime trends back to 1981. The report includes a section on crimes experienced by children aged 10-15.
 - *Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences (Violent Crime)* is the successor to *Homicides, Firearm Offences and Intimate Violence 2010/11: Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales*³⁰ published by the Home Office and assessed in Assessment report 102. It provides detailed analysis of violent crimes including the use of firearms, sexual and domestic violence, and details of homicides, as well as presenting long-term trends.
 - *Focus on Public Perceptions of Policing, Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (Perceptions)* is the successor to *Perceptions of crime, engagement with the police, authorities dealing with anti-social behaviour and Community Payback: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey*

²⁷ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/publication/review-police-crime-incident-reports-20120125/>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly-march-2013>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-against-businesses-headline-findings-from-the-2012-commercial-victimisation-survey--2>

³⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116483/hosb0212.pdf

*Supplementary Volume 1 to Crime in England and Wales*³¹ published by the Home Office and assessed in Assessment report 102. It presents findings from the CSEW about police visibility and perceptions of the police in local areas, along with information about individuals' engagement with community policing.

- *Focus on Property Crime (Property Crime)* provides an overview of property crime including trends and patterns in the circumstances of crime. Further sections present analyses of mobile phone theft, plastic card fraud and mass marketing fraud.

2.12 ONS has published additional statistical reports – released as 'short stories' – based on the findings from CSEW, the police recorded crime data and other related sources:

- *Trends in Crime – A Short Story 2011/12*³² was published alongside *Crime* in March 2012. It presents the headline statistics in the context of longer – term and international trends and reflecting the wider research literature.
- *Short Story on Anti-Social Behaviour, 2011/12*³³ is an ad hoc statistical report which presents statistics on adults' perceptions and experiences of anti-social behaviour from the CSEW, alongside findings from the 2012 Commercial Victimization Survey³⁴ produced by the Home Office.

These reports are not covered in this Assessment as ONS did not ask for them to be assessed.

Uses and users of crime statistics

- 2.13 ONS's crime statistics are used by the police as an operational tool and by the Home Office to design and monitor policies and strategies. Other government departments use specific aspects of the statistics to monitor their own policies – for example MoJ uses analyses focusing on perceptions of crime and criminal justice to inform the development of criminal justice system reform policy. Police and Crime Commissioners use the statistics to make comparisons with similar forces and regional and national averages, and to monitor local targets. Local authorities use the statistics to gain a regional picture of crime rates and to monitor the impact of policy reforms on council services, service users and the broader community. The statistics are regularly used by ONS and the Home Office to answer Parliamentary Questions about crime.
- 2.14 The statistics are widely reported in the media, reflecting the public interest in crime and the criminal justice system. Academics use the statistics as part of a wide range of criminal justice research and for teaching purposes. Voluntary organisations use them to assess the risks of victimisation across different groups.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/perceptions-of-crime-engagement-with-the-police-authorities-dealing-with-anti-social-behaviour-and-community-payback-findings-from-the-2010-to-2011-british-crime-survey>

³² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-march-2012/trends-in-crime--a-short-story.html>

³³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/short-story-on-anti-social-behaviour--2011-12/index.html>

³⁴ See footnote 29

- 2.15 These reports are published in PDF and HTML formats, with supplementary tables published in Excel. ONS publishes some CSEW tables in csv format in zipped files on the ONS website. Open data tables for police recorded crime are published by the Home Office³⁵. Anonymised datasets from the CSEW are available on the UK Data Service website³⁶. This equates to a level 3 rating under the Five Star Scheme proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*³⁷.
- 2.16 Non-official statistics drawn from provisional police recorded crime figures are published monthly at street level on www.police.uk. Some commercial websites, for example www.crime-statistics.co.uk, make use of these data. HMIC³⁸ makes use of National Statistics published by ONS and the Home Office. The web-based tool 'iQuanta', which provides provisional data before they are published, is also available to some operational staff – for example, staff within police forces, HMIC and Community Safety Partnerships. This is an operational tool for managing data at police force level.

Costs

- 2.17 ONS told us that it costs around £4.5m each year for ONS to produce these statistics. This includes £700k staffing costs and £3.8m to fund the CSEW.

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

³⁶ <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/>

³⁷ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

³⁸ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator/about-the-data/#recordedcrime>

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 ONS receives advice on the production of crime statistics from the Crime Statistics Advisory Committee³⁹ (CSAC), an independent committee established in response to a recommendation made in the National Statistician's Review. ONS regularly produces discussion papers for CSAC meetings; minutes and papers are published on the National Statistician's page of the Authority's website⁴⁰ and links are also provided from the landing page for the latest release of *Crime*⁴¹.
- 3.2 ONS told us that its primary user engagement is with other government departments and the police, often at Home Office events. ONS also attends the annual conference of the police force crime registrars, at which attendees discuss issues about the recording of crime by the police. ONS statisticians sit on the NCRS Technical Working Group and the Strategic Steering Group, both of which meet quarterly. In addition ONS meets members of the Crime and Justice Statistics Network, along with crime statistics experts within the Home Office and MoJ. The ONS statisticians have taken some steps to engage with other users – for example, discussing developments in the statistics with researchers who access crime survey data via the UK Data Service⁴². ONS told us that it meets other government departments, researchers and academics. However this user engagement is not fully documented.
- 3.3 In November 2012, ONS carried out a user consultation⁴³ about the content and presentation of the crime statistics outputs, and published the user views⁴⁴ that it received. The ONS statisticians told us that it also has a good insight into the wider use of these statistics through the high volume of requests and queries sent to the dedicated user email address, which it advertises in the statistical reports and on its website.
- 3.4 ONS responds to, and keeps a log of, requests to inform its statistical planning. However, it does not use this information to update and extend existing published information about uses, users' needs and users' views of the statistics. ONS has not published sufficient information about the quality requirements for the statistics for different uses, or about the extent to which

³⁹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-advisory-committees/crime-statistics-advisory-committee.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-advisory-committees/crime-statistics-advisory-committee---minutes-and-papers.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-june-2013/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-june-2013.html>

⁴² <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/about-us.aspx>

⁴³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/consultations/future-dissemination-strategy-for-the-publication-of-national-statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales/index.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/consultations/future-dissemination-strategy-for-the-publication-of-national-statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales/future-dissemination-strategy-summary-of-responses.pdf>

the full range of users' needs are met through the published statistics. The metadata in each of the reports, and the introduction section of *Crime*, note some uses of the statistics but these do not provide specific examples of how the statistics have been used by different types of users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should extend the published information about uses of crime statistics and users' needs in relation to the statistics⁴⁵ (Requirement 1). We suggest that in meeting this Requirement ONS should refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*⁴⁶. We also suggest that ONS create a Crime Statistics community on StatsUserNet⁴⁷ to help investigate and document uses and users' needs.

⁴⁵ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

⁴⁷ <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/Home/>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.5 ONS has published an organisational revisions policy⁴⁸, and provides links to it from the *User Guide to Crime Statistics for England and Wales*⁴⁹ (User Guide) for the statistical reports about crime. The User Guide also includes a revisions policy specifically for CSEW and police recorded crime.
- 3.6 The tables in *Crime* note that some statistics are subject to revision, for example the statistics taken from the Home Office Homicide Index. The introductions to *Crime* and the User Guide state that some statistics based on police recorded crime may differ in future releases, as police forces may re-categorise recorded crimes or some incidents may be 'no crimed'⁵⁰. Police forces submit a snapshot of their crime recording database each month to the Home Office, but records may be amended up to 24 months after the initial crime is recorded. ONS told us that when police forces make amendments to a crime record, the change is not flagged on the police crime database – so it does not receive details about changes to data previously submitted. However, ONS has started to investigate the scale of changes made to high profile crime categories, and it published information⁵¹ about the extent of change to the number of sexual offences recorded by police alongside *Crime* in October 2013. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide more information to users about the nature and extent of changes made to police records, and how to interpret changes in the published crime statistics from one reference period to another⁵² (Requirement 2).

⁴⁸ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/revisions/corporate-statistical-policy/index.html>

⁴⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/index.html>

⁵⁰ 'No crimed' is when an incident initially recorded as a crime is found not to be a crime following investigation. A table showing the numbers and percentages of 'no crimes' by offence group is published by ONS in the *User Guide* tables and official statistics on the number of offence 'no crimed' by police force area are published by the Home Office

⁵¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-june-2013/info-sexual-offences.html>

⁵² In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 and Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.7 The Authority notes frequent public comment about the quality of statistics based on police recorded crime data. The Authority welcomes the fact that ONS has publicly commented on these issues, such as in January 2013 by the publication of a analysis paper⁵³ about the variation in trends between comparable categories in the CSEW and police recorded crime data and through a detailed media briefing⁵⁴. In addition, a range of concerns⁵⁵ about the recording of crimes by the police have been expressed to the ongoing Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) Inquiry and to the Home Affairs Select Committee.
- 3.8 ONS is responsible for the contract management of CSEW, the processing and compilation of results from CSEW, and the compilation of the police recorded crime statistics. In accordance with the National Statistician's Review, the Home Office has retained responsibility for the collection and validation of police recorded crime data. Although ONS is responsible for the publication of statistical reports about crime, it consults Home Office statisticians to decide on the content of reports as the Home Office is responsible for policy making in this area. During the course of this Assessment, ONS shared with the Assessment team an (unpublished) Memorandum of Understanding between ONS and the Home Office which outlines the roles and responsibilities of each department in the production of statistics about crime. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish information about the roles and responsibilities of the departments involved in the production and publication of crime statistics⁵⁶ (Requirement 3).

⁵³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/methodological-note--analysis-of-variation-in-crime-trends.pdf>

⁵⁴ As reported, for example, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21178847>

⁵⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/crime-statistics/?type=Written#pnlPublicationFilter>

⁵⁶ In relation to Principle 3, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.9 The methods used to produce statistics from the CSEW are described in *Crime Survey for England and Wales Technical Report Volume One*⁵⁷ (CSEW Technical Report) with some summary information included in the statistical reports and in the User Guide. The User Guide provides an overview of the other data sources which are used in the production of statistics about crime, for example recorded crime data, the Homicide Index and the fraud data supplied by Action Fraud, but ONS does not explain how these data sources are received and processed for use within the reports. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should explain more fully how all the administrative data sources are used to produce statistics about crime⁵⁸ (Requirement 4).
- 3.10 The User Guide does not explain the circumstances under which police may amend records, the procedures carried out by the police to submit amended records to the Home Office, or how regularly amendments occur. It states that the Home Office launched the Data Hub in July 2013 to more effectively transfer police force data to the Home Office. However, the User Guide does not provide information about how many police forces use this system at present or any impact on the data collection procedures. ONS does not explain the procedures for checking the accuracy or completeness of the data received (either via the Data Hub and the aggregate returns), or how the data are compiled. It does not receive information from the Home Office about the scale of missing or incorrect fields within returns or records which the Home Office receives from police forces. Such information would assist ONS in building a picture of the reliability of the data submitted by police forces which it uses to produce the statistics, and in establishing the extent to which the statistics meet users' quality needs.
- 3.11 As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should a) publish further detail about the processes used by police forces in updating and submitting data and by the Home Office in validating the data; b) collect information from the Home Office about the quality of the data received from police forces; c) consider the implications of this information for the production of statistics of a quality that meet users' needs; and d) reflect this within the published quality information for users⁵⁹ (Requirement 5).
- 3.12 *Crime* presents information about how the statistics based on CSEW and police recorded crime data should be interpreted together. Information about the limitations of supplementary data sources is also presented within the reports and the User Guide – for example the limitations of Hospital Episode

⁵⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/index.html>

⁵⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

⁵⁹ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2 and 3 and Protocol 1, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

Statistics⁶⁰ are clearly explained within *Violent Crime*. ONS has also investigated particular issues with measuring crime and reported on this – for example, it recently submitted a paper to CSAC⁶¹ about the challenges of measuring cyber crime, and plans to improve the data available. It also submitted a paper to CSAC about the divergence between CSEW and police recorded crime. During the course of this Assessment, ONS made the details about the main sources of bias and error associated with CSEW and police recorded crime more accessible in *Crime*. The User Guide includes links to tables showing confidence intervals for the statistics derived from CSEW. ONS also added to *Crime*: information about the comparability of the statistics with related statistics produced for Scotland and Northern Ireland; and information about the timeliness of the release of the statistics.

- 3.13 While these are helpful developments, the Assessment team considers that ONS provides insufficient information about the extent to which the limitations of the various sources have an impact on the quality and utility of the statistics. Although ONS includes information in *Crime* and the User Guide to assist users in interpreting the statistics about fraud appropriately, it does not provide sufficient information about the potential bias and error introduced due to the new fraud recording arrangements. ONS does not publish enough information about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs, the coherence of the statistics with other statistics about crime, and the coherence of the data collected from police forces via the Data Hub and aggregated returns. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve, and make more accessible, information about all aspects of the quality of crime statistics and the impact on their use⁶² (Requirement 6). We suggest that ONS produce a diagrammatic representation showing how police recorded crime data are subject to bias and error at each stage of the recording process, perhaps as part of taking forward Suggestion 8 (see para 3.27).
- 3.14 Recommendation 6 of the Authority's Monitoring report *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*⁶³ published in May 2010 noted the importance of providing public reassurance about the consistency of the statistics derived from police recorded crime records: '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.' This was further reinforced by Recommendation 8 of the National Statistician's Review which stated 'quality assurance of police recording of crime should be re-focused by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) on risk areas in terms of the statistical quality of the data, informed by statistical analysis and taking into account other relevant contextual issues. The existing audit programme should be built upon with due regard to burdens on the police'.

⁶⁰ <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/hes>

⁶¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-advisory-committees/crime-statistics-advisory-committee---minutes-and-papers.html>

⁶² In relation to Principle 4, Practices 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

⁶³ See footnote 16

- 3.15 Following these recommendations, in 2012 HMIC published a review⁶⁴ of the quality of crime data and incident data recorded by all 43 police forces in England and Wales plus the British Transport Police, and the arrangements in place to ensure that standards are maintained and improved. In the evidence⁶⁵ that HMIC presented to PASC, it noted the conclusion of that review as finding ‘that there remained a wide variation in the quality of decision-making associated with the recording of crime’. The review also concluded that ‘This variation has the potential to impact on the levels of recorded crime, particularly for those forces that make poorer decisions in this area.’ HMIC carried out a further review in Kent Police Force⁶⁶ and concluded that ‘appreciably more needed to be done before the people of Kent could be confident that the crime and resolution figures published by the force were as accurate as they should be.’ Additionally, during the course of this assessment, evidence⁶⁷ was presented to PASC which raises further questions about whether the quality assurance processes associated with police recorded crime data are sufficient to meet users’ needs in relation to the quality of these statistics. ONS has also itself noted⁶⁸ the hypothesis that the growing gap between the CSEW and police recorded crime series could be due to a ‘gradual erosion of compliance with the NCRS such that a growing number of crimes reported to the police are not being captured in crime recording systems’. The ONS statisticians presented a number of possible drivers for this change.
- 3.16 The Authority is clear that regular, systematic audit of the underlying data is essential to increase both the quality of, and public confidence in, these statistics and any others produced by similar means. We understand that HMIC is planning to conduct a formal inspection of police crime data integrity, due to report in 2014⁶⁹. The Authority welcomes the HMIC inspection. As part of the designation of recorded crime statistics as National Statistics, ONS should a) keep users informed about the progress of the HMIC audit; b) review published quality information in the light of the findings of the audit; and c) consider whether statistics based on police recorded crime data can be produced to a level of quality that meets users’ needs, taking into account information gathered in the course of meeting this report’s Requirements⁷⁰ (Requirement 7).
- 3.17 Reflecting government targets introduced as part of the Police Performance and Assessment Framework, the Home Office increased the sample size of the British Crime Survey (now CSEW) in 2004 to ensure that all police force areas had a sample of at least 1,000. This was so that the survey results could be used to measure performance against the targets. In 2011, when the Home Office was still responsible for the publication of statistics about crime based on

⁶⁴ See footnote 27

⁶⁵ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/WrittenEvidence.svc/EvidencePdf/3530>

⁶⁶ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/publication/crime-recording-in-kent/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/crime-statistics/?type=Written#pnlPublicationFilter>

⁶⁸ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/methodological-note--analysis-of-variation-in-crime-trends.pdf>

⁶⁹ See footnote 13

⁷⁰ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2, Protocol 1, Practice 3 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

recorded crime data and CSEW, it announced⁷¹ that, since the targets had been abolished and that it had to reduce spending in response to the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, it had investigated the impact of reducing the sample size. It explained what it found about the impact on confidence intervals, and provided examples of the impact the change would have. This change was implemented by ONS, via the TNS BMRB contract, for the 2012/13 survey. *CSEW Technical Report*⁷² explains that for 2012/13 the core sample size was reduced – approximately 35,000 interviews were conducted with adults during the year compared with 46,000 interviews conducted in the previous year. The survey was designed to achieve a minimum of 650 core interviews in each police force area. There was also a reduction in the target number of interviews with children from 4,000 in 2011/12 to 3,000 in 2012/13. ONS does not provide links to information about the background to this change, or publish information itself about the impact of this change, along with the slightly reduced response rate, on the quality of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish, or clearly link to, information about the changes in the CSEW sample size and response rate over time and the impact of these changes on the quality of the statistics⁷³ (Requirement 8). We suggest that ONS conduct a preparatory review of the investment that would be required to enhance the CSEW sample size, so that it addressed users' needs for police-force area level crime statistics.

- 3.18 ONS participates in the Four Nations Crime Survey Managers Meeting with statisticians who work on crime statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland in order to discuss aspects of the production of crime statistics. ONS told us that, as a result of these discussions, it has started to prepare a paper about the comparability of crime statistics across the UK. The planning of this paper was noted in the previous Assessment of crime statistics. ONS plans to provide information about the extent of similarity between terms and definitions used, and to compare overall trends across the four administrations of the UK. ONS told us that it plans to publish this paper in 2014. It also told us that the Government Statistical Service's (GSS) Crime and Justice Theme group is planning to provide information about the comparability of headline crime statistics, and to produce comparable indicators for the four UK administrations. We suggest that ONS publish the comparability paper when completed, provide a link to it from the crime statistics reports and provide links to any published GSS Theme group work on the comparability of crime statistics.

⁷¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116210/consult-bcs-sample-design.pdf

⁷² See footnote 57.

⁷³ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.19 TNS-BMRB has published a statement about confidentiality and data security on the CSEW information website⁷⁴. We suggest that ONS provide a link to the statement about confidentiality and data security from its landing page for statistics about crime.

⁷⁴ <http://www.crimesurvey.co.uk>

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.20 *CSEW Technical Report*⁷⁵ presents some information about the burden of the CSEW in terms of the numbers of interview respondents targeted in each police force area. The website for the CSEW⁷⁶ provides information for respondents, including copies of the letter sent to households⁷⁷ and the CSEW information leaflet⁷⁸. A separate section presents information about the survey of 10-15 year olds.
- 3.21 Police recorded crime data are taken from police administrative data systems and submitted to the Home Office. Police data suppliers told us that they collect most of these data as part of their routine work. The Home Office launched the Data Hub (see para 3.10) to collect police recorded crime data directly from police forces. Some forces told us that they now supply the monthly data via the Hub and that it is a straightforward process. Other forces reported delays and difficulties moving to this system and continue to submit data returns which are not automated. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should work with the Home Office to publish information for users about police forces' progress in switching to use of the Data Hub, and the reason why this has taken so long⁷⁹ (Requirement 9).
- 3.22 A report by the National Policing Improvement Agency⁸⁰ identified the bureaucratic nature of the police recorded crime data recording process, especially around the entry of data for 'no crimes' and the reclassification of crimes when 'Additional Verifiable Information'⁸¹ (AVI) is required. The Chair of CSAC recently wrote to the Home Secretary⁸² to inform her that the Committee provided advice to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) recommending the production of a 'Practitioners Guide to Additional Verifiable Information', and that the Committee agreed that the guide should be adopted across all forces.

⁷⁵ See footnote 57

⁷⁶ <http://www.crimesurvey.co.uk/index.html>

⁷⁷ <http://www.crimesurvey.co.uk/downloads/CRIME%20SURVEY%20Advance%20letter%20-%202013-14.pdf>

⁷⁸ <http://www.crimesurvey.co.uk/downloads/Crime%20Survey%20Information%20Leaflet.pdf>

⁷⁹ In relation to Principle 6, Practice 1 and Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

⁸⁰ http://www.college.police.uk/en/docs/Understanding_crime_recording.pdf

⁸¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224119/count-general-july-2013.pdf

⁸² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-advisory-committees/letter-from-stephen-shute-to-the-home-secretary---avi.pdf>

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.23 When responsibility for the publication of crime statistics transferred from the Home Office to ONS in April 2012, the two organisations arranged a series of loans and secondments to share knowledge and build up expertise amongst the newly-established ONS crime statistics team (which was drawn from existing ONS staff as well as some Home Office experts). The initial establishment of the crime statistics team in London helped provide continuity, and facilitated the necessarily close working relationships with stakeholders in the Home Office and HMIC. Over the last 18 months the team has gradually relocated to ONS' Titchfield office, and by April 2014 it is expected that the whole team will be based in Titchfield. We have been told by both ONS and the Home Office that working relationships remain effective.
- 3.24 The production of the statistics currently appears to be sufficiently resourced. Nevertheless, this Assessment report contains a substantial suite of recommendations, particularly in relation to recorded crime statistics. Accordingly, as part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the staffing profile of the crime statistics team with a view to providing assurance that it remains sufficiently resourced⁸³ (Requirement 10).

⁸³ In relation to Principle 7, Practices 1 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.25 ONS includes some helpful commentary in the statistical reports about how to interpret the changes in the statistics between reference periods and over the longer term. For example, the violence section in *Crime* explains that, although year-on-year decreases in violent crime over the last decade have not been statistically significant, the change is statistically significant over the medium-term. The commentary is also helpful in seeking to account for wider changes in society; one such example is in *Property Crime*, which explains that some changes in trends in property crime are a result of changes in the types of property that people own, such as an increase in the ownership of smartphones and tablets. During the course of this Assessment ONS released *Crime*, which noted that the changing numbers of offences could be impacted by policy changes. We suggest that ONS continue to enhance the commentary, taking into consideration the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.26 Information about the nature and extent of crime is of interest to the general public as well as subject experts. It is not clear whether the content of the reports about crime reflect the information needs of the general public. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the content of statistical reports about crime, taking into account the information gathered in the course of addressing this report's recommendations. In doing this, ONS should consider and publish its conclusions about: a) whether the differences in recording practices across police forces are such that they have an impact on the suitability of presenting statistics at a *national* level for recorded crime; and b) the extent of user demand for a measure of reported crime derived from police administrative systems⁸⁴ (Requirement 11).
- 3.27 ONS publishes some information about the crime recording process within its statistical reports about crime and supporting documents, but this does not clearly set out the full range of possible actions that can be taken following a crime, which influence whether or not the crime is included in recorded crime data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish more detailed contextual information to explain the impact on the published statistics of the full range of possible actions that can be taken by members of the public, police and other organisations following either being a victim of a crime, observing a crime or receiving a report of a crime⁸⁵ (Requirement 12). We suggest that ONS consider the case for developing a conceptual and presentational framework for crime statistics, as it has done for population and migration statistics.
- 3.28 Users told us that they have difficulties in accessing the information most relevant to their needs, both on ONS's website and in following the correct pathways from ONS's website to other statistics about the criminal justice system. The information that users can access about crime statistics is

⁸⁴ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 and Protocol 1, Practice 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

⁸⁵ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

dependent on the route that they take to find these statistics on ONS's website. During the course of this Assessment, ONS improved the links on the Crime and Justice theme page of its website, including new links to some relevant statistics in Scotland and Northern Ireland, MoJ and the Home Office. ONS told us that it has drafted guidance about the sources of crime data and the topics covered by these sources. It plans to extend this to explain the relationship between the different sources and make it available on its website. ONS has produced detailed supporting documents in addition to the suite of reports, but these are not organised or linked effectively on its website. ONS told us that it recognises the difficulties with its website and that work is ongoing to resolve these issues. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the accessibility of the crime statistics on the ONS website and publish information about the relationship between the crime statistics and other related statistics produced across the criminal justice system⁸⁶ (Requirement 13).

3.29 Statistics based on police data about crime are published in different formats on a range of government, policing and private websites⁸⁷. ONS does not explain the different purposes and uses of these websites, and the differences in the data used and processing of data, in order to help users find the information relevant to their needs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide guidance about the uses and purposes of the various statistics available about crime based on police data, and explain the distinct purpose of ONS statistics based on police recorded crime data⁸⁸ (Requirement 14).

3.30 The CSEW data are made available through the UK Data Service⁸⁹ and ONS's Virtual Microdata Laboratory.

⁸⁶ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

⁸⁷ For example see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>, <http://www.police.uk/>, <http://www.crime-statistics.co.uk/> and <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator/about-the-data/#recordedcrime>

⁸⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 1, 2 and 4 and Protocol 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁸⁹ See footnote 36

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.31 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.32 Over 140 individuals have pre-release access to *Crime*. This includes two people in each police force that supply recorded crime data. ONS told us that this list was inherited from the Home Office and that there is an organisational level review currently taking place. This review is considering the eligibility of individuals on pre-release access lists, including those for the crime reports, and it is expected to result in a reduction of the number of individuals who receive pre-release access. However, the pre-release access list for *Crime* has not yet been reduced. As part of the designation as National Statistics ONS should ensure that pre-release access for *Crime* is only granted where absolutely necessary⁹⁰ (Requirement 15).

⁹⁰ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.33 ONS's Statement of Administrative Sources⁹¹ (SoAS) does not include the Homicide Index dataset which is used to produce *Violent Crime*. It also does not explain the arrangements for auditing the quality of all of the administrative sources used to produce these statistics. The landing page on ONS's website for the SoAS refers readers to quality and methodology information documents for this information, but the Assessment team was unable to find such documents in relation to statistics about crime. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should add the Homicide Index dataset to the Statement of Administrative Sources and include in the Statement information about the arrangements for auditing the quality of all the administrative data used to produce statistics about crime⁹² (Requirement 16).

⁹¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/the-national-statistics-standard/code-of-practice/statement-of-administrative-sources/index.html>

⁹² In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the statistics about crime in England and Wales produced by ONS, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 2 | Create a Crime Statistics community on StatsUserNet to help investigate and document uses and users' needs (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 3 | Produce a diagrammatic representation showing how police recorded crime data are subject to bias and error at each stage of the recording process, perhaps as part of taking forward Suggestion 8 (para 3.13). |
| Suggestion 4 | Conduct a preparatory review of the investment that would be required to enhance the CSEW sample size, so that it addressed users' needs for police-force level crime statistics (para 3.17). |
| Suggestion 5 | Publish the comparability paper when completed, provide a link to it from the crime statistics reports and provide links to any published GSS Theme group work on the comparability of crime statistics (para 3.18). |
| Suggestion 6 | Provide a link to the statement about confidentiality and data security relating to CSEW from the ONS landing page for statistics about crime (para 3.19). |
| Suggestion 7 | Continue to enhance the commentary, taking into consideration the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to further improve the statistical reports (para 3.25). |
| Suggestion 8 | Consider the case for developing a conceptual and presentational framework for crime statistics, as has been done for population and migration statistics (para 3.27). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A2.1 In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*⁹³. While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical reports covered by this Assessment, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical reports, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics

- A2.3 The reports contain impartial commentary written in straightforward language. Key points are consistent with the statistics and are presented at the start of the reports, and explanations are included for technical terms. The commentary draws out the main messages and clearly explains some complex statistical issues. The commentary makes efforts to account for wider changes in society. However, the commentary includes little information about the impact on the statistics of changes in local policing policies and initiatives, and operations within the criminal justice system.
- A2.4 The reports are lengthy and contain a substantial amount of detailed information; the PDF versions of the reports would benefit from a table of contents to enable readers to access the statistics most relevant to their needs.

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A2.5 The reports provide information about some changes to the statistics and include links to relevant supporting documents. *Crime* refers to the transfer of the responsibility for producing the crime statistics from the Home Office to ONS and includes links to relevant reviews and consultation documents. Some users told us that they would find it useful for the introduction in the reports to include a link to a single webpage containing all the published documents relating to changes in the statistics.
- A2.6 The ‘focus on’ reports provide links to further sources of research about crime which provide context for the statistics. It is not made sufficiently clear if these links are to National Statistics products or to other research.
- A2.7 *Crime* provides only a brief overview of the users and the use that they make of the statistics.
- A2.8 *Crime* provides links to comparable statistics produced for Scotland and Northern Ireland. It explains the similarity between the crime statistics produced for Northern Ireland and those produced for England and Wales, and the reasons why the crime statistics produced for England and Wales are not comparable with those produced for Scotland.

⁹³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

A2.9 Various websites present crime statistics and some of these are sourced from ONS statistics. During the course of this Assessment, ONS wrote to the owners of the websites that present ONS data asking them to make clear the sources of the statistics. ONS does not provide information about the various uses and purposes of all the statistics about crime based on police data.

Include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential use

A2.10 *Crime* contains a 'data sources' section which presents information about the strengths and limitations of the CSEW and police recorded crime. Further information is presented in the User Guide, which is linked to from all the statistical reports.

A2.11 Several data sets are used to compile the statistics and the introductions to the reports state the sources used, for example the Commercial Victimization Survey and data from courts that are used in *Crime*. However, the text does not indicate the sources of these statistics, or provide links to information about their strengths and weaknesses and the likely impact on their use. Some explanation is included about the limitations of the data presented from NFIB and Action Fraud, but this does not cover all limitations – for example, that some NFIB data are reliant on voluntary industry cooperation.

A2.12 ONS provides insufficient information about the sources of bias and error introduced during the process of crimes being recorded by the police.

Be professionally sound

A2.13 The reports include appropriate tables and charts, and descriptions of changes, trends and patterns are professionally sound and consistent with the statistics. Time series are presented going back to the early 1980s and changes in recording practices are clearly annotated on charts and explained in the commentary.

A2.14 The commentary in *Crime* explains some technical statistical concepts in a clear and understandable manner – for example, how changes in the statistics over time could be statistically significant.

A2.15 The commentary within reports and supporting documents includes cautions about the quality of statistics based on police recorded crime data but ONS does not make clear the implications for various uses of the statistics.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.16 The reports include links to supporting data tables published in Excel format. These tables provide data by country, local authority and police force area. The charts in the reports have useful direct links to the supporting data. ONS publishes revisions and confidentiality policies on its website but these are not referenced in the reports.

A2.17 A series of supporting methods documents are presented on the ONS Crime Statistics methodology webpage. Some of the individual documents are linked to in the various reports but this main landing page is not linked to, meaning that some users could be unaware of this page. The User Guide provides some information about the methodology used in the production of the CSEW but it does not provide sufficient supporting information about the quality of these

statistics, or signposting to such information. For example ONS does not link to information about the impact of the change in sample size for CSEW, which was implemented when the Home Office were responsible for publishing the statistics. The User Guide provides some information about the collation of the recorded crime data but there is no overall comprehensive document about the quality and methods underlying the recorded crime data.

- A2.18 The coverage, publication date and producer are clearly stated on the front of the reports with contact details for the lead statistician presented toward the end of the reports.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from June 2013 to January 2014.
- A3.2 The Assessment team – Emily Gleeson and Emma Bowditch – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 31 July. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS during September to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.
- A3.4 The Assessment team received 50 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Police	36 (22 of which were data suppliers)
Academia	6
Local government	2
Central government	2
Not for profit organisations	2
Devolved administrations	1
Media	1

- A3.5 Police forces supply recorded crime data and they reported that they would collect the data for their own performance monitoring reports, even if they were not required to submit them to the Home Office. Some forces that responded to our consultation reported that they now supply the data via the Home Office Data Hub and that this is generally a straightforward process. Other forces reported delays and difficulties moving to this system and continue to submit data returns which are not automated. While the guidelines were noted to be clear, some forces said that they were informed of data changes at a late stage. Those that had attended an ONS event were content with the level of ONS consultation; others had no recollection of contact with ONS and said that they deal only with the Home Office. Some concerns raised by users were around the consistency of data reporting by forces, for example around domestic violence incidents. There was a call from users for increased transparency in how the police recorded crime data are managed and analysed by ONS.
- A3.6 Users who had contact with the crime statistics team in ONS told us that the team is helpful and responsive to queries. The users who responded to us noted that the quality of the statistics is generally sufficient for their needs and

several users welcomed the published information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics. Some issues were highlighted – for example, the impact of changing definitions on time series and the effect of the reduction in the CSEW sample size on regional analysis. Some suggestions for further improvements were made, such as further geographical breakdown of the data in the supplementary tables. Users of the raw data told us that they find it helpful in their work; however some comments indicated that a number of users might not have knowledge of, or access to, this raw data.

- A3.7 Users told us that the commentary is helpful and informative and provides valuable background information. Some users would find more information about regional trends and ‘Most Similar Groups’⁹⁴ for police forces useful.
- A3.8 Some users reported that they had difficulties accessing the information most relevant to their needs from ONS’s website. Other users told us that they found it challenging to understand the ways that crime statistics were published across different government departments, the exact statistics that each department publishes and the range of statistics available. Suggestions about how to improve the signposting to different aspects of crime statistics included a dedicated signposting section on ONS’s website, and a diagram to indicate the types of crime statistics available across government.

⁹⁴ <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/media/most-similar-groups-technical-note.pdf>

Annex 4: Summary of Requirements from Assessment report 102

A4.1 The set of statistics published in Crime Statistics was assessed in Assessment report 102 published in April 2011. They have been prioritised for re-assessment partly due to the high-profile nature of concerns raised recently about some aspects of the police's recording of crime data, and partly reflecting the fact that responsibility for the production of the statistics transferred from the Home Office to ONS in April 2012. The content of *Crime* has been enhanced and the supplementary bulletins produced by the Home Office have been replaced by the 'Focus on' reports covered by this re-assessment.

A4.2 Assessment report 102 identified the following Requirements in relation to the statistics being re-assessed here:

Requirement 1 Ensure that information about revisions and forthcoming changes to methods is more clearly and consistently communicated to users.

Requirement 2 Improve the information about methods and quality presented in the Supplementary Volumes.

Requirement 3 Publish more information about the quality of the police recorded crime statistics, including the consistency with which crimes are recorded and classified.

Requirement 4 Publish more information about the 'capping' of incidents reported in the British Crime Survey.

Requirement 5 Ensure that data are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata.

A4.3 The Statistics Authority confirmed the National Statistics designation of these statistics in a letter to the Home Office on 20 January 2012⁹⁵.

A4.4 Four Requirements within this report relate to aspects of *Code* compliance that resulted in Requirements in Assessment report 102. These are:

Requirement 2 Provide more information to users about the nature and extent of changes made to police records, and how to interpret changes in the published crime statistics from one reference period to another (para 3.6).

Requirement 5 a) Publish further detail about the processes used by police forces in updating and submitting data and by the Home Office in validating the data; b) collect information from the Home Office about the quality of the data received from police forces; c) consider the implications of this information for the production

⁹⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/confirmation-of-designation-letters/letter-of-confirmation-as-national-statistics---assessment-report-102.pdf>

of statistics of a quality that meets users' quality needs; and d) reflect this within the published quality information for users (para 3.11).

Requirement 6

Improve, and make more accessible, information about all aspects of the quality of crime statistics and the impact on their use (para 3.13).

Requirement 7

a) Keep users informed about the progress of the HMIC audit; b) review published quality information in the light of the findings of the audit; and c) consider whether statistics based on police recorded crime data can be produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, taking into account information gathered in the course of meeting this report's Requirements (para 3.16).

A4.5 Requirement 1 in Assessment report 102 related to Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice* and resulted from the Home Office not always announcing changes to methods in advance, taking an inconsistent approach to communicating revisions and not including links to the Home Office revisions policy within reports. Since the transfer of responsibility for these statistics to ONS, changes have been pre-announced and the User Guide includes a link to the ONS revisions policy, as well as including CSEW and police recorded crime specific revisions policies. However, ONS does not publish information about the extent of revisions to recorded crime statistics at the same time they are released, or provide guidance to users about how to interpret changes in the statistics between reference periods given the usual extent of changes to the data, leading to Requirement 2 in this report.

A4.6 Requirement 3 in Assessment report 102 resulted from insufficient discussion in the reports about the quality of police recorded crime data, including the accuracy and extent of crime recording by different police forces. It was noted in the report that HMIC was due to commence a trial of spot-checking police forces in April 2011 to investigate the accuracy with which crimes are recorded and classified. The Home Office statisticians told the Assessment team that the findings from HMIC inspections would provide more concrete evidence to support discussion of these quality issues.

A4.7 In meeting this Requirement the Home Office provided additional information in their User Guide and the Annual Crime report to explain some of the issues that have an impact on the police recorded crime statistics, such as the targeting of particular crimes. The ONS User Guide includes some information about the HMIC findings and notes that these were based on a small sample. Insufficient information is available to allay public concerns about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs, the coherence of the statistics with other official statistics about the criminal and justice system, or the accuracy and reliability of the statistics, leading to Requirements 5, 6, and 7 in this report.

