Policing In The Iron Cage: The Tensions Between The Bureaucratic Mandate And Street Level Reality

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POLICING IN THE IRON CAGE: THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE BUREAUCRATIC MANDATE AND STREET LEVEL REALITY

By

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In April 2002 a National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was introduced across police forces in England and Wales. The intention of this standard, resultant of two highly critical reports regarding police recording of crime, was to improve crime data and promote a victim focussed approach. Research in the field of crime recording emphasises police reporting and recording mechanisms, with a significant reliance placed on police data. However, inter-personal and situational factors determining the ways in which notification of an event is, or is not, translated into a crime record are often inadequately explored. Consequently, there is little recent knowledge regarding the views of individuals reporting an event and the way in which they, through the interactions with the police, affect recording rates.

This thesis explores these effects and investigates the impact of deviation from the rules governing crime recording upon service user experiences and satisfaction. Incident logs from three forces were analysed, officer focus groups and questionnaire-based surveys were undertaken and interviews were conducted with service users. Perceptions of service users and police officers vis-à-vis the effectiveness of police intervention were examined, together with the efficacy of previous research methodologies employed to gauge recording rates, the rules regarding crime recording and the existent performance
frameworks. The findings suggest that previously reported recording rates are inevitably unreliable owing to a lack of detail within incident logs and the complexities involved in the recognition and labelling of events as crimes. Whilst easing of workloads is a common theme highlighted in previous research, there is notably less emphasis and recognition of other factors. The response, by officers at street level, to the realities of the social world, the conflicting priorities brought about by managerial dictum and the bureaucratic rules governing the recording of crime is to ‘define down crime’. The findings fill the considerable knowledge gap regarding diverse service user requirements and conflicting priorities faced by service providers prior to the introduction of the NCRS, suggesting that the imposition of managerial ideals, the accompanying bureaucratic rules and the corollary, the diminution of discretion, has a detrimental effect on service delivery.
For Dad
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I never imagined when I started out in the world of academia that I would have reached this point and the credit for much of my academic evolution, and indeed at times revolution rests with my supervisors Alan Marlow and John Pitts; to both, I shall be forever indebted. Finally a huge thank you to my wonderful wife Tracy whose patience, understanding and encouragement kept me going when completion seemed so far off.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree of examination in any other university.

Stephen A. Hallam

6 February 2009
Chapter 1  Introduction

‘Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy (Gerth and Wright Mills 1970, p. 228).’

In April 2002, following two highly critical reports regarding the way in which the police recorded crime, (see Burrows et al, 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) introduced a National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) (Chan 2003; Hallam 2003; Maguire 2007; Pilkington 2002; Tilley et al, 2007). This new standard, subsequently incorporated into the Home Office Counting Rules, (Home Office 2002a) was undoubtedly intended to pre-empt Home Office intervention. A publicly espoused key element of the NCRS was to regulate crime recording, enabling comparisons of data across forces, thus providing the bedrock for a performance regime (Blunkett 2001; Home Office 2000) whilst at the same time providing a more victim orientated approach.

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the hypothesis that deviation from the rules governing crime recording, identified by previous research, was a product of inevitable tensions between the situational realities of frontline policing and the bureaucratic demands placed upon police officers, resultant of managerialism and performance measurement. A key element of this hypothesis is whether the deviation from the rules governing the recording of crime impacts on service delivery or whether, under certain circumstances, such deviations in fact promote a more victim orientated approach that was purported to be the ethos behind the introduction of the NCRS (Home Office 2002a).
With an initial focus on defining under-recording of crime, to establish to what extent it occurred prior to the introduction of the NCRS, an overall synopsis of recording outcomes has been derived. This provided an indication of the breadth and scale of deviation from the rules governing crime recording at that time, together with the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. Previous research methodologies, employed to gauge the under-recording of crime, were replicated and examined to determine the efficacy of these approaches in explaining police crime recording rates. This work involved an examination of incident data, focus groups and a questionnaire based survey sent to police officers and staff.

Whilst previous research is abundant in the field of crime recording, much of it has its emphasis on the reporting and recording mechanisms within the police service, with a significant reliance placed on the data collated by the police in the ordinary course of their work. As a consequence, this previous research fails to adequately explore the interpersonal and situational factors that determine the ways in which notification of an event is, or is not, translated into an official record of a crime. There is little recent knowledge about the views of the victims or individuals reporting an event and the way in which they, through the interactions with the police, affect the recording or under-recording of crime. To derive a clearer understanding of the latter, several methods were used to track crime events from the initial report by a member of the public through to a recording outcome, with the intention of gaining an understanding of the issues both from officers’ and the public’s perspectives. The research was conducted following the publication of the two critical reports published in 2000 (see Burrows et al, 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and took place over a two year period in three forces, between 2000 and early 2002, prior to the introduction of the NCRS.

Policing and police accountability, particularly since the 1960s, has been subject of much study and debate (see Bowling and Foster 2002; Downes and Morgan 1997; 2002; Loveday 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2004; 2006; McLaughlin 2007; Newburn 2003) and as a
consequence numerous theories and descriptions of policing have emerged over the decades. One of the key issues in policing has been the notion of crime control, (see Crawford 2003; Garland 1996; Loveday 2000a; McLaughlin 1996) but it is clear that ‘the police have a more limited capability for crime control than is generally assumed’ (Hough 1987, p. 70) and ‘there is, as yet, no clear or unambiguous evidence that the police have either the capacity or the capability to significantly influence the crime rate’ (Loveday 2000a, p. 219). Even the most vociferous exponents of the crime control myth, the Audit Commission, conceded: ‘The causes of trends in crime recording are imperfectly understood … It is also difficult to determine the exact contribution of policing to falls in crime levels (Audit Commission 1996, p. 4).’

The inability to forge concrete links between crime rates and police activity is due to a number of phenomena at play and ‘ethnographic researchers confirmed that the exact nature and scope of police activity is in fact difficult to define and, for the most part, unrelated to law enforcement and criminal detection’ (McLaughlin 2007, p. 52). ‘Police work is more likely to be peace-keeping than crime chasing, social service than social conflict (Heidensohn 1989, p. 137).’ Furthermore, crime might be defined as a sum of all the actions deemed as a ‘violation of the criminal law’ and that criminal law sets out what may be considered deviations from societal norms. However, this gives rise to a number of problems, as criminal laws are not fixed or permanent in society. Class and power have considerable influence on the scope of criminal law, as does the need for the law to reflect social changes.

A number of commentators have been highly critical of successive governments’ attempts at controlling crime, not least because in doing so they have attempted to control the police by setting objectives and performance indicators (Leishman et al, 1996; Loveday 1997; 1999; 2000a; Reiner 1994) and thus have changed the ethos of policing within England and Wales. Regardless of this fact, governments have poured significant finances into policing and the criminal justice system with an expected outcome of
controlling crime. Expenditure on the criminal justice system has increased significantly in recent decades, this increase in the United Kingdom was on average 4.1 per cent per annum between 1979 and 1997 (Solomon et al, 2007) with overall spending on the criminal justice system amounting to approximately £187 billion since 1997 under New Labour. Whilst the police have not received the biggest increases in spending, the Probation Service, Crown Courts and the Crown Prosecution Service have received far greater increases, the police service still accounts for approximately sixty-one per cent of the overall criminal justice budget and during 1997–2005 the service saw a twenty-one per cent increase in funding. The Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (2006) concluded that this increase in expenditure did not appear to have a direct correlation to productivity, particularly where productivity was measured in terms of crime detection. This overly simplistic view is reminiscent of the view of the Conservative Government of the mid 1990s who, against a backdrop of rising crime and ‘an increasing share of public expenditure’ (Leishman et al, 1996, pp. 12-13), called into question police performance.

In order to gauge performance in the ‘war against crime’ (Morgan and Newburn 1997, p. 73), successive governments have relied upon police recorded data and more recently British Crime Survey (BCS) data. The differences between these data sets and the validity of both are explored and explained by Maguire (2002; 2007). Suffice to say that neither data set provides absolute clarity around crime trends (Farrell and Pease 2007). The BCS provides a more reliable estimate of the offences it covers, but the actual offence coverage is far narrower than that covered by police data (See Maung 1995). The BCS is also not without its critics, who suggest that even those crimes that are measured within the BCS sweep, particularly violent crime, are inaccurate and may be approximately 33% higher than reported (Farrell and Pease 2007). However, police data resultant from ‘the processing and recording of crime is as much a socially constructed event as the definition of crime’ (Heidensohn 1989, p. 5) and official crime rates are ‘constructed on the basis of a variety of administrative and legal considerations’ (Bottomley and Pease 1986, p. 3) that vary over time.
Previous studies have shown that recording inconsistencies arise ‘as a consequence of complex interplay of different pressures and influences’ (Burrows *et al*, 2000, p. 6) or interactions and negotiations (Heidensohn 1989). These pressures and influences are subdivided into social, political, organisational and situational contexts (Coleman and Moynihan 1996). They include ‘formal and informal interpretations of “proper” policing duties (themselves based on perceived expectations of the public) “working considerations” or a general desire to “ease” the job’ (Burrows and Tarling 1987, p. 235). Similar factors include the perceptions by officers that a report by a victim may be mistaken or disingenuous or there is insufficient evidence that a crime has been committed. Some incidents may be regarded as too trivial to warrant formal police action, particularly if victims indicate they do not wish to proceed with the matter, or if the incident has already been satisfactorily resolved (Kershaw *et al*, 2000).

In general terms crime statistics, like any other social statistics, ‘are not objective reflections of social reality’ (Miles and Irvine 1981, p. 115) but are a construct involving ‘an imperfectly functioning bureaucracy, tonnes of paper and computing machinery, and - last but not least – millions of hours of human grind’ (Government Statisticians’ Collective 1981, p. 149). ‘In short, neither police recorded data nor the BCS provide an adequate basis for making claims about overall rises or falls in crime levels’ (Solomon *et al*, 2007, p. 27). A recent analysis by the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit (2006) suggested that eighty per cent of the reduction in the official crime rate since 1997 was the result of economic factors.¹ A more recently leaked document from the Home Office suggesting

¹ According to Field (1990; 1999) thefts and burglaries are linked to the stock of crime opportunities resultant of long-term consumer spending. Therefore, a growth in property crime is intimately linked to economic growth. He also noted that increases in property crime were linked to increases in the numbers of young males in the population. However, Field also noted that in the short term, rapid consumption growth has a tendency to depress property crime growth, and vice versa.
that the economic downturn might lead to an increase in property crime was dismissed by the policing minister as ‘a statement of the blindingly obvious’ (Watt and Sparrow 2008).

The problems surrounding the formulation of national statistics for crime are not solely a UK preserve. Maltz, (1999) in discussing the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) used to provide data to publish the annual ‘FBI Crime in the United States’ report, indicates that the quality of data provided to the FBI is lacking, with the reporting of data for many jurisdictions remaining a voluntary activity and despite the efforts of the FBI to maintain data quality, the many gaps in the data makes its use questionable. Feinberg (2000) is also critical of the manner in which crime statistics are gathered in the USA, suggesting that there are fundamental flaws in the crimes that form part of the UCR index.

Likewise, the National Uniform Crime Statistics Committee in Australia (1988) reported that there were variations in crime statistics due to differences in legislation across states; the extent of unreported crime; inadequacies in offence definitions, counting rules and offence classifications; procedural differences such as the offences under which an offender may be charged; differences in the way statistics are compiled as a result of the lack of uniformity in systems used and non-compliance with the rules governing the collation of statistics. More recent research conducted by Carcach and Makkai (2002) relating to the crime statistics in the state of Victoria, Australia, indicated a variation in recording rates dependant on whether an evidential or prima facie approach was applied by officers involved in the crime recording process.

Selke and Pepinsky (1982) concluded that if the police respond to crime and record it then crime rises and the police are blamed for failing to control crime. However, if they fail to record a crime event they are seen as being unresponsive to citizens. Consequently the police fall foul of political pressures and data is manipulated (see also Loveday 2000a) therefore, ‘[i]t is clear that any attempt to measure ‘actual crime’ should be the responsibility of someone outside the justice system’ (p. 341).
In recognition of the unreliability and limitations of police recorded crime data, there have been a number of articles, reviews and discreet pieces of research across England and Wales to explore and explain the variations in quality across and within forces (for example Burrows 1986; Burrows et al, 2000; Farrington and Burrows 1993; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b; MacCabe and Suttcliffe 1978; Steer 1980) with the most recent, taking a view that data quality should somehow be improved and regulated to narrow the gap between the British Crime Survey findings and police recorded crime data and perhaps more importantly, to enable government to gauge performance of forces. To arrive at this conclusion the latter research concentrated on police incident data (as opposed to crime data) as a basis for investigation, and in doing so, whilst recognising limitations to the incident data, there was an assumption that the data was a sufficiently adequate platform for such an exploration and therefore suitable to draw subsequent conclusions about recorded crime.

However, the previous research and the resultant introduction of the NCRS, failed to take into account the motivations behind the reporting of events that might subsequenctly be labelled as crimes. To impose rules and regulations that drive the recording of crime ignores the fact that the public call the police for a range of reasons, and do not necessarily require ‘concrete action’ (Ekblom and Heal 1982, p. 5) but sometimes simply just reassurance or actions ‘to calm the perpetrator’ (Hoyle and Sanders 2000, p. 22). Equally, the wider social context in which such a report is made is not recognised. For example MacDonald (2001) links the reporting of crime to economic cycles, thus burglaries, for instance, are more likely to be reported and therefore recorded at certain times within an economic cycle than others. Finally, the social consequences of the actions of recording an event as a crime appear to have been ignored or subjugated to performance management ideals. Consequently, those assumptions that the recording of crime needs to be rigorously regulated, to ensure that there is little scope for deviation from anticipated norms, merely serves to rationalise the recording of crime and depersonalise each event.
The desire and need to regulate and standardise recording of crime by the police has a resonance with Max Weber’s ideal bureaucracy (Gerth and Wright Mills 1970) where discretion is minimised by adherence to strict procedural rules. ‘These rules, aiming at the avoidance of any arbitrary action, imposing strict discipline and control, do not leave much room for initiative and discretion’ (Mouzelis 1975, p. 41). Whatever the correct translation of Weber’s ‘stahlhartes Gehäuse’ (Tiryakian 1991), ‘iron cage’ appears to be a more than adequate description of the bureaucratic apparatus within a policing world characterised by impersonal rules that explicitly set out the responsibilities, standardised procedures and overall conduct of those that work within the structure.

The description of an ‘iron cage’ of rationality that limits choice to one form of rationalised enterprise or another seems to be an ideal starting point for this thesis. For within the rigid framework of objectives, measurements, regulation, rules and audit created by successive governments in an attempt to control crime, lies a burgeoning bureaucracy that stifles innovation and discretion in furtherance of governmental goals and the accompanying sound bites that belie the reality of the social world.
Chapter 2 New Public Management: More for less

Against a background of accelerating economic decline, post war consensus politics reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s came under increasing strain during the 1970s in Britain. Unsustainable levels of public expenditure coupled with rising inflation, high unemployment and high taxes forced successive governments to move away from Keynesian economic policies (Flynn 1993; Jackson 1992). Consequently over time the ‘adverse economic conditions’ and the resultant ‘governmental overload’ (Metcalf and Richards 1993, p. 1) forced governments to reconsider extravagant spending policies to reduce the burden on public expenditure. On the back of this shift in emphasis, the Conservative Government of 1979 came to power promising substantial cuts in public expenditure except in the National Health Service, defence and law and order (Flynn 1993). The main objective of their macroeconomic policy was to be the control of money supply and public expenditure cuts in order to curb inflation (Jackson 1992). Monetarist policies, the most dominant theme of the Conservative Government during the Thatcher era, found its basis in a philosophy that ‘every effort should be made to give incentives to private sector wealth creation as against public sector wealth consumption’ (Metcalf and Richards 1993, p. 1).

Running parallel to these policies was a sustained effort to instil in governmental mechanisms notions of ‘value for money’ by the way of economy, efficiency and effectiveness directed towards the management of apparent ever-diminishing resources (Newman and Clarke 1994). This increased emphasis on public management, rather than administration, coupled with an emphasis on a market-based economy closely associated with privatisation has traditionally had its basis in the ideologies associated
with those to the right of the political spectrum (Flynn 1993). The transferring of private sector management models into public sector organisations are subject of much debate not only around suitability but also around penetration and durability, for Stewart and Ranson (1994, p. 54) ‘[s]pecific management ideas can be transferable. What is not transferable is the model of management – its purposes, conditions and tasks’. This lack of transferability is discussed in the context of service providers suggesting that services that are most valued are in fact immeasurable and owing to pressures for lower delivery costs, less skilled auxiliary staff are employed or work is outsourced (Painter and Isaac-Henry 1997). The net result is the creation of constant tensions between managerialism and professionalism within public sector organisations, where both inward and outward looking organisational structures conflict (Flynn 1993). For Metcalfe and Richards, ‘bureaucratic rules’ and ‘business budgetary control systems’ that constantly constrain and undermine professionalism should be avoided:

… such organisations should not be immune from management direction or accountability. In both respects, they should be subject to processes that reinforce rather than undermine professional commitment. A system of accountability that constantly overrides professional peer group criteria will produce poor results. Going against the grain of professional commitment will lead to demoralisation and conflict between managers and professionals.  

(1993, p. 236)

The advent of Neo-Taylorism, and its later offspring New Public Management (NPM), described as repackaged Neo-Taylorism (Pollitt 1993), heralded a change in the way public services were managed and held to account by central government. The formation of ‘quasi-markets; intensified organisational and spatial decentralisation of the management and production of services; and a constant rhetorical emphasis on the need to improve service quality’ were to become known as NPM (Pollitt 1993). This change was described as ‘a strategy to centralise knowledge about local performance while
decentralising responsibility for the execution of government policies’ (Carter 1991, p. 96). Perhaps more pointedly, this strategy has also been described as a decentralisation of blame by central government in response to hard times (Wistow 1992).

The Thatcher years saw an increased move towards a centralisation of power through the ‘subordinating of all public sector agencies to ministers – particularly the transformation and expansion of quasi-governmental agencies and the suppression of residual local government powers over taxing and local spending’ (Dunleavy 1997, p. 132). Quasi-markets were highly managed, entirely artificial constructs running to a set of rules, definitions and formulae invented largely by senior officials in Whitehall and furthermore, in some cases gave managers further influence over rank and file professional service deliverers (Pollitt 1993). When John Major came to power, central government espoused a friendlier consumer service ideology packaged as the Citizens Charter; however, his government failed to reverse the trend of the subordination of public sector agencies to governmental control. Instead the Government developed an even stronger hold on public sector services by creating an emphasis on grievance-handling bodies and an increased emphasis on independent inspection (Hood and James 1997), the latter being described an ‘audit explosion’ (Power 1994).

This ‘audit explosion’ also dubbed the compliance explosion was supported by an expanded public audit into ‘policy evaluation’ and a greater emphasis on ‘independent inspection and grievance handling’ (Hood and James 1997, p. 197). Thus the instigation of the Citizen’s Charter ethos was juxtaposed with performance standards across the public sector (Hood and James 1997). Market reforms and the introduction of competition for high ratings in inspections rapidly led to a weakening of professionalism and self regulation amongst public sector employees whilst at the same time promoting and enhancing managerialist approaches. This managerialism, with the growth of audit and inspection, resulted in considerable increases of new rules and standard operating requirements (Hood and James 1997).
The 1997 election that saw a Labour Government return to power did little to diminish the basic ethos of NPM, instead ‘there was every evidence that New Labour proved to be more committed to this approach than the Conservative Government it had replaced’ (Loveday 2000a, p. 218). Activity Based Costing and the introduction of the Best Value regime (Davis et al, 2001) became the new buzzwords within the public sector, complimenting the ideology of economy, effectiveness and efficiency. Targets and monitoring mechanisms were repackaged and relabelled but the overall theme remained essentially unchanged, with further decentralisation of responsibilities and increased central control. This regulatory culture gave rise to distrust amongst professionals who felt themselves to be the primary targets of inspection systems (Rustin 2003), as the ‘new accountability culture aimed at ever more perfect administrative control of institutional and professional life’ (O’Neill 2002, p. 2) took hold.

The new accountability in the form of legislation, regulation and control gave rise to even greater bureaucracy as public bodies produced information in specified formats to feed a burgeoning performance culture. Oversight of this adherence to control mechanisms was and continues to be, overtly managed by the publication of targets, league tables and external audit and inspection. Professional practice and integrity are called into question, distorted and subjugated to management ideals (Hood and James 1997; McLaughlin 2007; McLaughlin and Muncie 1994) in the drive for increased accountability and central control which in itself is presented as a means to an end, a drive for better performance from public sector bodies.
Chapter 3  Managed and cost effective crime control

When the Conservatives came to power in 1979 they had specific policies aimed at restoring law and order, which in turn meant increased spending on the police and fighting crime (Downes and Morgan 1997). The alignment of the law and order policies of the Police Federation and the Conservative Party prior to and immediately after the 1979 elections meant that the police were inevitably seen as ‘pets of the Thatcher Government’ (Reiner 2000, p. 209). This view was further supported by the introduction of the National Reporting Centre set up by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in order to coordinate the mutual aid policing operation during the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

The setting of performance targets for the police service was initially raised during the early 1980s. Home Office circular 114/1983 (Home Office 1983) stated that there was a need for the effective and efficient use of resources and that Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) would adopt an approach in their inspections regarding the setting, by chief officers, of realistic objectives and priorities (Morgan and Newburn 1997; Newburn 1995; Reiner 2000; Walker and Richards 1996). However, critics viewed the circular as promoting a bureaucracy, whereby efficiency would inevitably dominate over effectiveness owing to the nature of ease of measurement and the short-term nature of the objectives (Jones and Silverman 1984).

The police service up to this juncture had escaped any major managerial scrutiny partially owing to a very real need for the government to have their support during the industrial disputes that took place in the early to mid 1980s. This support was to be gained with an injection of capital into the police and in turn there was a real expectation that crime
levels would fall. However, neither the support of the police nor the reduction in crime ‘was to be so easily achieved’ (Morgan and Newburn 1997, p. 2). From 1981 to 1991 crime had risen at an average of 3.2 per cent and continued to rise by 10.8 per cent from 1991 to 1993 (Home Office 1998a). The need for support from the police did not stem the disquiet amongst Conservative ministers that the police were not fulfilling the promise of crime control. ‘Perceived deficiencies in police management began to accumulate in the early 1980s, and were reinforced further as the decade progressed (Leishman and Savage 1993, p. 213).’

These deficiencies led to an unprecedented scrutiny of police management and police roles and responsibilities resulting in three separate reviews of policing in 1993. Reporting within close proximity, were the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice (1993), the Sheehy Inquiry into Police Responsibilities and Rewards (1993) and the Home Secretary’s White Paper on Police Reform (Home Office 1993; see also Jones and Newburn 1997; Newburn and Morgan 1994). Concerned with both the effectiveness and efficiency of the police the reviews led to a radical shift in policing politics (Leishman and Savage 1993). A further 1993 Home Office Review of Police Core and Ancillary Tasks, completed in 1995 (Home Office 1995b), examined the services provided by the police, with a remit ‘to make recommendations about the most cost effective way of delivering core police services and to assess the scope for relinquishing ancillary tasks’ (Newburn and Morgan 1994, p. 144).

According to Reiner (2000) the review achieved little; the end product was to merely recommend that the escorting of wide loads on the highways could be privatised and contracted out. Furthermore, considering the Government’s drive towards NPM (Pollitt 1993), Reiner’s view that the Review of Core and Ancillary Tasks (Home Office 1995b) was simply to flesh out what had already been decided, was well founded. The various reviews were to lead to the enactment of The Police and Magistrates’ Courts Act 1994, which was later subsumed into The Police Act 1996. Reiner (1994) takes a forthright
stance in his commentary on these reviews relating to police roles. In particular, in
discussing the White Paper that preceded The Police and Magistrates’ Courts Bill, he
highlights a paragraph within the paper whereby it was announced that ‘The main job of
the Police is to catch criminals’. Reiner describes this as ‘breathtaking in its audacious
simple-mindedness’ (Reiner 1994, p. 151).

The change in management styles and ‘the wide spread movement towards a more
managerialist, business-like ethos which emphasises economy, efficiency and
effectiveness’ needs to be examined against the backdrop of the inability of successive
‘law and order governments’ to effectively deal with the law and order problem (Garland
1996, p. 455). This movement towards a more managerialist approach, with the setting
of performance indicators, gives considerable credence to the opinion that NPM was
about centralising knowledge regarding performance but decentralising responsibility and

A more businesslike ethos was being forced upon the police whilst at the same time they
were to become more accountable to central government (Reiner 2000) and, it is
suggested, moved towards nationalisation (Johnston 2000; McLaughlin 2007). This was
to be achieved in part by a number of provisions contained within the Police and
Magistrates’ Courts Act 1994 and the Police Act 1996 which ceded power to the Home
Secretary, brought about significant central control of the police and their activities
(Leishman et al, 1996; Loveday 2000b; Morgan and Newburn 1997; Newburn and Jones
1996) and enabled government to dictate the priorities for the police by setting objectives
and performance targets.

This ‘calculative and contractual’ accountability changed policing from service provision
into a ‘crime control business’ (McLaughlin 2007, p. 184). The Acts placed on a statutory
footing the ethos of NPM (Benyon and Edwards 1997; Dunleavy 1997) and had the
overall effect to not only ‘centralise knowledge about local performance while
decentralising responsibility for the execution of government policies’ (Carter 1991, p. 96) but also to centralise administrative control (O’Neill 2002) of the police and ‘reign in professional powers, discretion, roles and values’ (Clarke et al, 1994) of chief officers. 

Following the introduction of the Police and Magistrates’ Courts Act 1994, police forces, as a result of central government targets backed up by performance indicators and increased oversight by the Audit Commission and HMIC (Reiner 2000), became more overtly concerned about crime rates, crime detection and detection figures. The relationship between recorded crime and detection rates created several dilemmas that to this day remain unresolved. What was clear was that the measurement of success of the police became geared towards measurements of those things that were measurable and within the direct control of the police, more notably outputs rather than outcomes (Garland 1996). The direct control though, was inevitably not of crime per se but of the production of crime statistics. To this end a crime control model for policing emerged, policing to meet objectives and hitting, centrally set, hard targets. The response in some forces to Home Office circular 114/1983 was the adoption of ‘Policing by Objectives’ (Leishman and Savage 1993, p. 218). This has simply continued, being adopted by all within the service as a consequence of the 1994 Act and the later 1996 Police Act.

Whilst Garland (1996) saw the development of these performance indicators and the managerialist approach as a consequence of the overburdened crime system brought about by contemporary society, Reiner concluded:

For the most part, however, the fashionable languages of managerialism and consumerism overlook the fact that policing is not about the delivery of an uncontentious service like any other. Their business is the inevitably messy and intractable one of regulating social conflict. They cannot control, but rather are buffeted by, the prevailing currents in that temporarily banished concept, society (1992b, p. 49).
However, central government, the Audit Commission and HMIC subscribed to the managerialist model of policing. By the early 1990s HMIC used a matrix of 435 performance indicators to identify issues and the basis of force objectives (Carter et al, 1992). A description of the manner that the Audit Commission saw crime being dealt with by the police suggested that ‘[i]t is noticeable that the Audit Commission is employing military terminology – intelligence and field intelligence officers – which meshes closely with the Home Secretary’s enthusiasm for the language of war against crime’ (Morgan and Newburn 1997, p. 73). This ideology epitomises the notion that the police by a sound policing policy will somehow control crime (see Audit Commission 1993).

The return of a Labour Government in 1997 saw a commitment to modernisation of the public sector and managerial centralisation (Loveday 2006) by ensuring that ‘police force and police authority efforts were directed to realizing both Whitehall defined ‘best value’ and crime reduction targets’ (McLaughlin 2007, p. 184). In what was viewed as New Labour’s commitment to implement the recommendations of the Morgan Report (Home Office 1991b), 1998 saw the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act and the creation of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (Gilling 2008). The Act required local authorities to carry out crime audits in their areas, ‘drawing on opinion polls, focus groups and feedback from local health, education, social security, housing and other departments’ (Loveday and Reid 2003, p. 13). Together with the police, the authority is required to draw up Crime Reduction Strategies, which they have statutory responsibility to implement (Crawford 2007; Loveday and Reid 2003). However, as Loveday notes, in a survey only a few Londoners had heard of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). As an HMIC report was to comment, there was ‘an abundance of stated commitment but significantly less evidence of visibility, direction accountability and review’ amongst chief executives, directors of services and the chairs of partnerships (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000a, p. 54). The HMIC inspection noted a lack of understanding of Section 17 of the Act and this in part, was blamed on the lack of adequate guidance provided by central government.
The contribution of CDRPs to the sustained reduction of crime rates was officially reported (Audit Commission 2002; Home Office 2004a) to be ‘a little on the disappointing side’ (Gilling 2008, p. 41). Owing to this political disappointment, the government carried out a review leading to the publication of a National Community Safety Plan (Home Office 2005c). The plan outlines government commitment by requiring ministers to prioritise community safety policies and consider community safety in new and existing policies (Crawford 2007).

New Labour’s second term in office saw a number of notable shifts in ‘managerialization of policing’ (McLaughlin 2007, p. 185). In a move to yet again reform the police service, the Home Office launched a new reform agenda in December 2001 with a White Paper ‘Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for Reform’ (Home Office 2001). As the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on Police Reform were to later comment:

> The White Paper argued that despite a fall in overall levels of crime, extra funding for the police, and a reversal in the decline of police numbers, the police faced challenges including: levels of crime that were too high, fears about crime remaining high, the need to target persistent offenders, a marked decline in detection rates, police performance was too variable, and the need to maintain the confidence of the public.

(House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2005b, p. 7)

The White Paper, preceded the Police Reform Act 2002, and amongst a number of other items, outlined the introduction of an annual National Policing Plan, the setting up of a Police Standards Unit (PSU), improved training, leadership and professionalism, powers for the Home Secretary to intervene to suspend a chief officer or to require improvement in performance, making better use of officers’ skills and tackling unnecessary bureaucracy. The PSU ‘was set up to boost the operational effectiveness of BCUs … [and] was also authorized to identify problems which required the direct legislative
intervention of the Home Secretary’ (McLaughlin 2007, p. 185-186). The Police Reform Act once again, reinforced central control of police activities, a fact that was noted by the Home Affairs Committee on Police Reform: ‘We share the general concern that central interference in the running of individual forces is not desirable’ (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2005b; House of Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs 2002).

In 2002, the drive to improve police efficiency was bolstered by the publication of the ‘Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce’ report (Home Office 2002c). The report required police forces to cut back on wasteful paperwork in order to free up officers to patrol the streets, to invest in modern technology, make the effective use of support staff and to simplify and streamline operational procedures which link into other criminal justice agencies. Whilst ACPO and the Police Superintendents’ Association were later to suggest that great strides had been made in reducing bureaucracy, both the Police Federation and the then Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Ian Blair, were less enthusiastic about the reality. The issue was not one of reducing forms, but of integration of IT, which a significant number of the ‘Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce’ report’s recommendations were reliant upon (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2005b). In reality the report had little impact as forces strived to survive the myriad of Home Office dictates, threatened interventions (see McLaughlin 2007) and ‘micro management’, as illustrated by the Government’s ‘Street Crime Initiative’ (Newburn 2007).

In a pledge to ‘reinvigorate local police governance’ (Newburn and Reiner 2007, p. 927) and to ‘democratize police practice’ (McLaughlin 2007) the Government launched the White Paper ‘Building Communities, Beating Crime’ in November 2004. Notably the White Paper promoted BCUs and CDRPs and not police authorities (Loveday 2005), reinforcing what was to be seen as a ‘new localism’ (McLaughlin 2007) in accountability. The Government’s goals were set out as reducing crime and anti-social behaviour as well as reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. This was to be done by ‘effective
partnership working’ (Home Office 2004a p. 16). Effective change was to be brought about by the introduction of ‘multi-functional Neighbourhood Policing Teams’ allowing for high visibility on the streets, ease of public contact and flexible staffing and working practices (McLaughlin 2007). However, to make this a reality requires chief officers to devolve resources and decision-making powers to BCU managers. Surveys of BCU commanders showed that this was clearly problematic. They felt that they had too little control over budgets and were hampered by centralised targets that had no bearing on local issues (Loveday and McClory 2007; Superintendents’ Association 2003).

The publication of the National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009 (Home Office 2005c) saw expanded central control with the setting of priorities for the police aligned to the treasury PSA Delivery Agreements. The all encompassing plan tied in the police, local authorities, local strategic partnerships (LSPs), CDRPs, drug action teams, primary care trusts, children’s trusts, Jobcentre Plus, local criminal justice boards and fire and rescue services into delivering government aims and objectives. Reinforcing the 2004 White Paper (Home Office 2004a), a key element within the plan was the embedding of neighbourhood policing in every community by 2008. An updated National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009 published in November (Home Office 2005d) saw a commitment to implement the review of partnership provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; embed the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime; and streamline existing performance arrangements for crime, drugs and policing, resulting in a fifty per cent reduction in measures.

The introduction of the Police and Justice Act 2006 further enhanced the provisions of the 1996 and 2002 Police Acts. This provided the Government with more central control and direction of policing (Newburn 2007) and gave the Home Secretary more power to intervene in so called failing forces or BCUs. Although no longer required to produce a national policing plan the Home Secretary could produce a National Community Safety Plan but there was no statutory requirement to do so (Loveday and McClory 2007).
Under the Act, police authorities are required to produce a three-year rolling policing plan that should contain objectives set nationally by the Home Secretary in the National Community Safety Plan and local priorities set by the police authority in consultation with the community, policing partners and the local force.

The Home Office Crime Reduction Strategy 2008–11 (Home Office 2007a) set out ‘a framework for central and local government, local crime-fighting partnerships and non-government organisations over a three year period’. The Strategy was followed by an updated National Community Safety Plan 2008-11 (Home Office 2007c) with the delivery of priorities tied into the Government's PSA Delivery Agreements to be published in October 2007 (Her Majesty's Treasury 2007). Whilst the plan appeared to allow flexibility to the determination of local targets, there was considerable central control through the requirement to meet the targets set in the PSA Delivery Agreements. Making it clear that delivery of the PSAs will be the responsibility of the police and partners, the Home Office determined the roles and responsibilities of partners including CDRPs, LSPs, Local Criminal Justice Boards, Probation Trusts, Children’s Trusts, Youth Offending Teams, Local Safeguarding Children Boards, Drug Action Teams and Drug and Alcohol Action teams, The Third Sector, Jobcentre Plus, Private Security Industry and Business Community.

In April 2008 the Home Office published the long awaited report, ‘The Review of Policing’ by Sir Ronnie Flanagan (2008). The report reinforces the value of managerial centralisation and the notion that the police control crime, by providing a description of increased central funding for the police and policing and a significant rise in police numbers, which:

… have undoubtedly contributed to a significant improvement in performance, with crime falling by a third since 1997 and public confidence in the police, which had been falling consistently since 1982, rising since
2003/4. These improvements have been supported by a greater emphasis on performance management, both centrally from the Home Office and internally within individual forces. Developments such as the Police Performance Assessment Framework have played a role in creating robust comparative data and focussing on more important areas of delivery.

(Flanagan 2008, p. 4)

However, whilst the report subscribes to the ethos of managerialism, it recognises a risk that the systems created may be ‘overly bureaucratic to administer’ (Flanagan 2008, p. 19) and that performance indicators may create ‘perverse incentives [that] compromise local innovation, efficiency and accountability’ (Flanagan 2008, p. 21). Indicating that the Home Office have recognised that the use of sanction detection rates and targets around offences brought to justice have produced perverse incentives and that a more proportional approach should be adopted to lower level crimes the report continues:

The consequence of poor professional judgement, combined with existing performance management arrangements, are that officers are encouraged to criminalise people for behaviour which may have caused offence but the underlying behaviour would be better dealt with in a different way.

(Flanagan 2008, p. 49)

A central theme within the review is the need to reduce bureaucracy to free up officer time, increase visibility and promote efficiencies. ‘[R]isk aversion in society at large, increasing reliance on heavily prescriptive processes inside the service, a subsequent decrease in professional discretion and an absence of personal accountability amongst officers’ are highlighted as the systemic drivers of bureaucracy (Flanagan 2008, p. 49).
In a drive to promote ‘new localism’ (Loveday and McClory 2007; McLaughlin 2007) and a more consumer led approach to policing, the Government published its Green Paper in July 2008, ‘From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together’ (Home Office 2008a). The paper builds on the recommendations from ‘The Review of Policing’ (Flanagan 2008) and a Cabinet Office review ‘Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime’ (Casey 2008). This latter review highlighted that significant proportions of the public held the view that crime is the ‘most important issue facing Britain today’. The review also highlighted that the public had a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, considered that standards of service delivered by the police should be the same in all areas, that sentencing is too lenient and community punishments should include some form of reparation to the community, that national crime statistics should be produced independently and that the public were prepared to play an active role in tackling crime. The review concludes unsurprisingly, that higher levels of concern around crime and disorder and lower confidence in the police and criminal justice system are to be found in the most deprived areas in the country. Perceptions, according to the review, are not just influenced by the media but are derived from people’s real concerns about their local area.

These conclusions do not appear to be anything astoundingly new. A 1998 Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit study (Bradley 1998) found that socio-economic differences affect people’s perceived and real exposure to threats to personal safety and security. These social-economic differences had an impact on the physical proximity to perceived less desirable elements or members of society. Age was also described as a good indicator of real and perceived threat and risk, with the young and elderly being at most risk. The British Crime Survey 2000 (Kershaw et al, 2000) reported on the perceptions of members of the public and their confidence in the criminal justice system. In this survey it was noted that less than half the respondents felt that the criminal justice system was effective in bringing people that committed crime to justice and only a quarter felt that the system met the needs of the victim. Research carried out by BMRB (Stone et
al, 2005) identified that public confidence in the police was reliant on a number of factors involving communication, interpersonal skills, interaction with the local community, visibility, integrity, balancing authority with sensitivity, impartiality and instilling a sense of safety. They also found that responding quickly to requests for help, being effective and efficient, having the necessary powers and witness protection were deemed important. Other factors included confidence in the criminal justice system and reports in the media.

The Green Paper (Home Office 2008a) sets out to make forces more accountable to local people through the introduction of: a new ‘policing pledge’, the embedding of neighbourhood policing and the direct election of the majority of the police authority members as ‘Crime and Policing Representatives’. Included in the paper is a mandate for the Police Authority, in co-operation with HMIC, to take the lead in the Chief Constable’s Performance and Development Review (PDR) process. Whilst in favour of the ‘policing pledge’, and the embedding of neighbourhood policing, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) voiced concern that the Green Paper ‘encompasses only a partial view of policing’ (Association of Chief Police Officers 2008, p. 6) ignoring the tensions arising from serious and strategic issues, as against volume and local issues.

The Police Federation were concerned that the focus was on neighbourhood policing, almost entirely ignoring CID and response functions (Police Federation 2008). Comment in the Federation magazine likened neighbourhood policing to ‘dredging through a swamp trying to sort problems out’, whereas CID and response ‘wrestl[e] the alligators’ (Federation 2008, p. 21). ACPO considered that the direct election of local representatives to the police authority would upset the inherent delicate professional balance, where strategic and national interests might be skewed in favour of local issues. They also considered that the tri-partite arrangement would be seriously damaged and Chief Constable operational independence would be lost, if the Green Paper proposals regarding Chief Constable accountability were to be changed.
Likewise the association of Police Authorities (APA) did not consider that the direct election of members would lead to improvements in strategic accountability; however, it welcomed the stronger and clear role in relation to chief officer appointment and appraisal (Association of Police Authorities 2008). The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee took the view that it was unclear how the reformation of local authorities would make policing more accountable locally and expressed concern that such changes may undermine partnership working between the police and local authorities (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008).

The Government however, not to be deterred, stated they would be introducing legislation to implement these proposals at the first opportunity. As far as government were concerned there were sufficiently strong arguments for introducing ‘Crime and Policing Representatives’ (Home Office 2008b). They also made it clear that they were committed to having Chief Constable performance reviews written by the Police Authorities with HMIC taking the lead on operational and national issues within the PDR process.

Reinforcing central control, the paper proposes that the Government will regulate to allow the removal of a chief executive or nominate extra members to the police authority where the authority is persistently under performing. The APA was decidedly unhappy with this proposal, suggesting that ‘the proposed intervention provisions seem in direct contravention of the wider direction of reducing central control’. Furthermore, the proposals ‘would have profound an unacceptable consequences on [the executive’s] line of accountability’ (Association of Police Authorities 2008, p. 45).

The Government’s response was to reinforce part of the proposals, insisting that where authorities persistently fail it will direct an authority, under the powers of the Police Act 1996, ‘to take whatever action is necessary to address these weaknesses …. This may include the imposition of an external third party to work with the authority and the Home Office to deliver the necessary changes’ (Home Office 2008b, p. 30). Whilst the Home
Office response did not specifically mention the forced removal of a chief executive, the Government flexed its muscles further by stating that continuous under performance would result in the removal of the Chief Constable.

The Green Paper puts forward a strengthened and significant role for a restructured HMIC. Performance management of forces will shift to HMIC, but HMIC are required to agree both its inspection program and criteria with Government. Whilst the Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) (Home Office 2008e) will remain, the Home Office will no longer make graded assessments under this framework. Instead HMIC in conjunction with the Audit Commission will inspect police authorities ‘across the full range of their activities’ (Home Office 2008b, p. 29) using ‘APACS and the National Indicator Set as the core data’ (Home Office 2008b, p. 30) and benchmarking forces using comparative data such as ‘most similar forces’.

To make forces more locally accountable there is a requirement in the Green Paper for forces to publish crime and police activity at a local level. The paper sets out to clarify the roles of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and their powers and ensure that funding is ring-fenced for a further three years. To help reduce bureaucracy the paper proposes just one top down target for the police – ‘to improve public confidence’. Both ACPO and the APA welcomed these proposals, although the APA were uneasy about the form of measurement with regard to public confidence, suggesting that the use of two quarters of BCS data is insufficient to establish a baseline and that police authorities and their forces were best placed to identify target levels (Association of Police Authorities 2008).

Agreeing that perverse incentives, caused by the top down measurement of sanction detections and offences brought to justice targets, had led to the criminalizing of individuals for trivial offences and skewed police activity, the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2008) welcomed the changes to the performance frameworks and the
removal of these targets in favour of one top down target, recommending that there should be a greater focus on qualitative measurements. The Committee voiced concerns that minor crime and anti-social behaviour, which are of great concern to the public, will continue to receive insufficient police attention. The Committee considered that there should be a two tier approach to recording of crimes ‘serious’ and ‘local crimes’ and that certain minor crimes should be reclassified as incidents, with discretion as to whether they need to be recorded. The Committee also recommended that officers should be given greater discretion to deal with incidents in an appropriate way, particularly from the perspective of the victim, but also for the offender and criminal justice system. The success of this however, relies on frontline sergeants who, the Committee viewed, should be trained and subject of national standards. The Home Office confirmed that the role performed by sergeants would be included in an HMIC workforce inspection in 2010 (Home Office 2008b).

Whilst the current tri-partite structure could be described as ‘not fit for purpose’ and the emasculation of local accountability has been brought about by recent legislation such as the Police and Magistrates’ Court Act 1994 and the Police Act 1996 (Loveday 2008), the Green Paper appears to merely reinforce central control. Instead of using the Police Standards Unit to flex government muscle, the role and status of HMIC is to be changed to drive forward Government imperatives. Chief officers are to have a more employee/employer relationship with their police authorities, effectively sounding the death knell on operational independence, a cornerstone of policing for a number of decades. Whilst the Green Paper espouses local accountability, it continues to strip back local autonomy and has not as ACPO suggested, upset the delicate balance inherent in the tri-partite structure, it has effectively done away with it. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2008) was clear that the role of the police had changed considerably and that there was a clear need to redefine its purpose, recommending that an independent review should take place such as a Royal Commission. In light of such dramatic changes, it is perhaps a recommendation that cannot be ignored.
Chapter 4  The crime control mantra

In 1994 the Home Secretary set national objectives for the police service on a trial basis, in advance of acquiring a statutory power under the Police and Magistrates’ Court Act 1994. Alongside this a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) were set out on which police performance would be measured (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary 1995). Two of the objectives related to increasing detections in violent crime and dwelling house burglary offences whilst a third related to tackling local crime problems in partnership with the public and other local agencies (See Figures A1 and A2). The first two key objectives and the corresponding KPIs remained the same for four years. In 1995, Key Objective 3 had an element of drug related criminality added and by 1997 the KPIs for this objective began to evolve around repeat victimisation and the number of arrests and disposals for drug related offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 per 1000 population.

By 1998 the Home Secretary’s key objectives and associated KPIs changed to reflect the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998. Detection measurement in violent crime and burglaries of dwellings were retained as separate objectives, but the third objective relating to crime prevention at local level was altered to introduce the concept of working with local authorities to reduce crime and disorder. Key performance indicators still included the element of measuring repeat victimisation but also required mechanisms to be established and local targets set, in conjunction with other agencies, to tackle crime and disorder. In addition, a separate objective was set ‘to target drug-related crime in partnership with other agencies’. The KPI for this objective was ‘the number of arrests for the supply and possession with intent to supply per 10,000 population’.
Fundamental to the Government’s approach though was the setting of the further objective ‘To deal speedily and effectively with young offenders and to work with other agencies to reduce re-offending’. The associated KPIs were to measure cases dealt with within time guidelines and the establishment of mechanisms to measure response to youth crime; a somewhat simplistic, albeit politically acceptable, approach to social, economic and cultural problems (Pitts 2001). HMIC continued to report on progress of police forces against these objectives and produced comparative tables, adding in elements of recorded crime in the categories of violent crime and burglary (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999).

The Audit Commission also reported on progress and produced comparative tables against its own suite of ‘volume crime’ indicators (Audit Commission 1997; 1998a). The Audit Commission’s view was simple, ‘[p]ublishing performance indicators should lead to an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of local services’ (Audit Commission 2000, p. 4). However, noting that there were significant variations in performance between police forces, the Audit Commission suggested that the data relating to crime detection performance indicators were in some way flawed, ‘[d]ue to the changes in the rules for counting crimes, it is difficult to compare the changes in performance of individual forces over the past few years’ (Audit Commission 2000, p. 15).

In 1998 the Home Secretary, in a letter to chief officers of police and police authority chairs, set out Ministerial Priorities (formerly key objectives), Key Performance Indicators, under the Best Value regime (See Figures A3 and A4), and Efficiency Planning for 1999/2000’. Reminiscent of the thinking of the Conservative Government of the early 1990s, the Home Secretary reminded chief officers and police authorities that spending on the police had increased by ‘104% in real terms over the last 20 years’ and that this substantial and increasing investment ‘makes it important that the service is able to achieve, and demonstrate, increasing efficiency’ and therefore resources would need to be ‘focused on frontline services to deliver national and local priorities’. By the end of
1998 the Audit Commission added its own additional indicators for 1999-2000. These included ‘violent crimes per 1000 population, burglaries of households per 1000 households and the percentage of domestic burglaries where the property had been burgled in the previous twelve months’ (Audit Commission 1998b).

At the same time, as a result of the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review, forces were required to make plans for a year on year two per cent efficiency saving. Developing the HMIC and Audit Commission arguments that an increase in police numbers does not necessarily increase performance the Home Secretary reiterated the crime control imperative, ‘[w]hile many factors clearly effect crime levels, effective police activity must have a crucial part to play’. In September the same year, the Government announced a national five-year target of a thirty per cent reduction in vehicle crime. The additional KPI relating to levels of recorded vehicle crime were intended to assist in measuring progress towards the target. However, the target only included recorded theft of, or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle, theft from a motor vehicle and aggravated taking of a vehicle. It did not include any attempted commission of these offences, effectively excluding the crime categories of vehicle interference and criminal damage to vehicles. Notably vehicle interference and criminal damage to vehicles had been introduced into the Home Office crime statistics returns in April 1998.

Whilst government and central agencies were imposing crime performance indicators on the police, they were at the same time suggesting that there was more to tackling public anxiety around crime and disorder. The publication ‘Safety in numbers: promoting community safety’ (Audit Commission 1999) suggested that the public’s fear for their

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2 The use of the term attempt TWOC is merely for illustration purposes since it is not legislated for in law to attempt to take a vehicle without the owners consent. The Criminal Attempts Act 1981 only relates to indictable and triable either way offences and not summary offences which applies to TWOC. However, catered for within the Act is an offence of vehicle interference.
safety was affected by a number of factors; crime was merely the ‘tip of the iceberg’ (p. 13). Incidents involving vandalism, noisy neighbours, domestic violence, speeding and nuisance youths all impact on individuals and communities and yet, more often than not, the police have given these low priority, preferring to give precedence to those offences that are measured and form part of national objectives.

This ‘tunnel vision’ (Smith 1995) led to a conclusion that national level performance indicators did not sufficiently reflect the emphasis on community safety in that ‘[p]olice forces still feel under pressure to increase detections per officer rather than to reduce crime’ (Audit Commission 1999, p. 37). This latter report was in stark contrast to an earlier publication (Audit Commission 1993) where the introduction of crime desks was advocated. Minor crimes were to be received and ‘investigated’ over the phone to promote effectiveness and efficiency. Whilst not recognised at the time, this was undoubtedly to the detriment of any close community contact and led to the simple administration of crimes that to the public were of real significance.

In June 1999 the Home Office set out an additional Ministerial Priority and corresponding indicators resultant of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (Macpherson 1999). The priority ‘to increase trust and confidence in policing amongst ethnic communities’ was accompanied by KPIs relating to recorded racist incidents, use of stop and search procedures, levels of recruitment and retention of ethnic minority staff and public satisfaction survey results.

In September 1999 a joint consultation document was published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Audit Commission on ‘Best Value and local authority performance indicators for 2000/2001’ (DETR 1999). The document set out proposed Best Value indicators and Audit Commission indicators. In December 1999 chief officers and chairs of police authorities were notified by the Home Office that the Home Secretary, using his powers under the Police Act 1996, had set out only two
Ministerial Priorities for 2000/2001 (see Figure A5). In a further letter from the Home Office dated December 1999 it was made clear that forces were expected, under the Local Government Act 1999, to set targets and performance indicators which should be proposed locally ‘so that there is a true sense of ownership by the police authority, the police force and local community’.

These indicators were in fact being finalised and the Audit Commission were reviewing which indicators they wished to set. The letter whilst promoting local ownership also reinforced central control by making it clear that under the ‘Local Government Act the Secretary of State can issue statutory guidance which states the matters which should be taken into account in setting performance targets and that these matters may include the range of performance expected to be attained by Best Value Authorities’. The indicators proposed, for which there was statutory guidance, related to domestic burglaries, robberies and vehicle crimes. Forces’ performance was reflected in league tables and they were given instructions to attempt to attain the position of being in the top quartile of performance. The final Best Value performance indicators (BVPIs) were notified to police forces by letter from the Home Office later in December 1999 (See Figure A6); notably the Audit Commission did not set separate indicators.

The imposition of league tables and upper quartile targets caused considerable consternation amongst police forces. In December 1999, Chief Constable Butler of Gloucestershire Constabulary wrote to chief officers setting out the concerns that he had raised with the Home Office, HMIC and the Audit Commission. Expressing the view that the setting of robbery targets was ‘ill conceived’ as only a few forces suffered a significant robbery problem, he considered that the imposition of robbery targets ‘flew in the face of accepted practice of chief constables and police authorities setting objectives and targets which reflected local concerns’. Furthermore, the comparison of police forces in relation to vehicle and burglary offences gave forces two options, the first to acquiesce and set targets as required by the Home Office or the second, to use historical data to forecast
trends based on a range of social economic factors. Butler argued that one force using crime modelling (Field 1999), had predicted an increase of eight per cent in property crime by the end of March 2003 based on an increase in the male population between the ages of 14 and 24 years. In conclusion, given that the Audit Commission had suggested they would be critical of unachievable targets, Butler was of the view that historical data would have to be used, bringing about the ‘significant danger that the service will find itself at odds with the Home Office’. In February 2000, the Home Office issued guidance on the BVPIs, having reached agreement with the police service that only five metropolitan forces were required to set targets in relation to robbery reduction.

In November 2000, the Home Office set out the ‘Ministerial Priorities for 2001/2002’, which remained the same as the previous year. Acknowledging some impact of demographic and economic factors, the Home Office gave credit to police forces for crime reduction but added, ‘crime levels would increase significantly if we do not concentrate our efforts on bringing them down. The Government has committed significant additional resources to the police and the criminal justice system for this purpose’. This significant increase in resources and an expectation of reduced crime was a clear case of déjà vu: a decade earlier the Conservative Government had much the same clear expectation (see Morgan and Newburn 1997).

Following notification of the setting of the Ministerial Priorities, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, under the Local Government Act 1999, published the BVPIs for the year (DETR 2000) making it clear that the Secretary of State was to have regard to economy, effectiveness and efficiency. Changing from the previous year, the BVPIs had become far more detailed in the requirements (See Figure A7). The BVPIs were ‘consistent with the existing and emerging Public Service

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3 Following consultation, the Audit Commission did not specify performance indicators for local authorities for 2001-02.
Agreements (PSA) between Government Departments and the Treasury’ (DETR 2000 p. 11). By the end of 2000 forces were notified that, in support of the monitoring of the new BVPIs, the 2001 British Crime Survey was moving from a biennial to annual cycle with a doubling of the sample size.

In April 2002, new and more complex Ministerial Priorities and BVPIs (see Figures A8 and A9) came into force and further guidance regarding these was set out in an explanatory letter from the Home Office in June of the same year. The guidance contained a four-page appendix to explain the definitions of ‘stranger offence’, ‘public place offence’, ‘licensed premises offence’ and ‘offence under the influence’ as they related to violent offences. Whilst requiring police forces to collect, collate and report on vast quantities of crime data, somewhat ironically the Home Office published its ‘Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce’ report (Home Office 2002c) in the same year. Kevin Bond the head of the newly formed Police Standards Unit further compounded this seemingly conflicting emphasis on data collection and reduction in bureaucracy when, in a speech to the Superintendents’ Association, he criticised data collection by the police:

"It is very hard to distil comparative performance data. In February we asked all forces for their crime data. [From] my background you expect data within a couple of days…. It was suggested we could get that data within 14 days. Within six months we still only had 50 per cent of the data requested; 25 percent of forces could not produce any data. That is not acceptable if you are running an operation and you need to know the data about what is happening (Orr-Munro 2002 p. 8)."

In November 2002, under the requirements of the new Police Reform Act 2002, the Home Office published the first National Policing Plan for 2003-06. Within it, the Home Secretary reinforced the crime control myth by congratulating the police ‘for having cut overall crime by 22% over the last five years’ (Home Office 2002b, p. 2). Setting out the
Home Secretary’s National Priorities and what were to be renamed, Police Best Value Performance Indicators (PBVPIs), the plan provided the linkage between the PBVPI and the Home Office PSA targets.

The police service will be the main contributor towards the delivery of PSA 1 and 2, with their focus on reducing crime and the fear of crime and on improving performance …. Local plans must include local targets against which the contribution from each force to meeting the national PSA can be measured (Home Office 2002b, pp. 35-36).

Accompanying PSA1 and 2 were a number of KPIs relating to levels of crime, youth crime, anti social behaviour and numbers of burglaries, robberies and vehicle crimes per 1,000 population, as well as progress on detections and convictions.

In February 2003 the Home Office announced the creation of its new police performance monitors enabling ‘the public to compare their police force’s performance with other similar police forces’. The monitors covering five major areas of policing were: reducing crime, investigating crime, promoting public safety, citizen focus and effective use of resources. These domains were to become known as the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (Home Office 2003c, d, e).

The Home Office published the National Policing Plan for 2004-07 in November 2003 (Home Office 2003b) setting out the Home Secretary’s National Priorities and Police Best Value Indicators (PBVIs) under the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). The priorities tied into the PSA targets, reflected a new citizen focus with a requirement to be more responsive to the needs of individuals and communities. At the same time anti-social behaviour and disorder, volume crime, serious and organised crime and increasing the number of offences brought to justice remained on the agenda. There was a notable absence of praise for the police and whilst acknowledging that progress
has been made in crime reduction, the Home Secretary commented that in some areas crime and fear of crime remained high. Providing a clear message that performance must be improved, the Home Secretary stated that ‘significantly reducing the performance gap will require forces to get within 10% of the current performance levels of their most similar force comparators by 2005/06’ (Home Office 2003b, p. 7).

The third National Policing Plan for 2005–08 (Home Office 2004b) tied to the Government’s Public Service Agreements, outlined the priorities to reduce overall crime, including violent and drug related crime, provide a citizen focussed approach to policing and combat serious and organised crime. Rather than requiring the police to tackle anti-social behaviour and disorder as in the previous plan, the police were required to ‘reduce people’s concerns about crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder’ (Home Office 2004b, p. 1). Additionally the police were required to work with partners to increase sanction detection rates and target prolific and other priority offenders. The Plan indicates that to meet the PSA target of a 15% reduction in overall crime, forces will need to concentrate on volume crime but may also have to develop new strategies to deal with other types of crime. The Plan introduced Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) within the Policing Performance Assessment Framework for which guidance was published in 2005 (Home Office 2005e). Whilst there were only thirteen main SPIs, these constituted 33 separate measurements, six of which related to data from the British Crime Survey.

The fourth and last National Policing Plan was published in 2005 as an annex to the National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009 (Home Office 2005c). The priorities for the police included bringing 1.25 million offences to justice by 2007-08, embedding neighbourhood policing to reduce perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour and tackling serious and organised crime, terrorism and domestic extremism. The National Community Safety Plan 2006-2009 was updated in November 2006 (Home Office 2005d). Recognising that the ‘community safety cannot be successfully delivered by the police on their own and that effective broadly based partnerships at national and local
level are vital’ (Home Office 2005d, p. 3), the plan sets out the strategic priorities for the police. The priorities, agreed with ACPO and the APA, included bringing offenders to justice through improved performance on sanction detections, enabling people to feel safer in their communities by embedding neighbourhood policing to reduce perceptions of anti-social behaviour, tackling serious and organised crime, protecting the country from terrorism and domestic extremism and reducing overall crime in line with the national PSA targets, including focusing on more serious violent crime, drug related crime and alcohol related crime and disorder.

The Home Office published the National Community Safety Plan 2008-11 in December 2007 (Home Office 2007c). Based on the delivery of nine Government PSAs, the plan set out a number of priority actions for the police and partners, including reducing the most serious violence, reducing serious acquisitive crime, tackling local priorities and increasing public confidence, and reducing reoffending. The Plan also set out the ‘Strategic Policing Priorities and Key Actions for the Police Service in 2008/9’. Aligned to the PSAs and APACS, the Strategic Policing Priorities (SPPs) included the reduction of crime, focusing on more serious violence, serious acquisitive crime, alcohol related crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour. Also included was a requirement to increase public confidence and satisfaction, to ensure an adequate capability to deliver effective policing to tackle serious and organised crime, to provide protective services and to deliver the counter terrorism and violent extremism strategies. The final priority was to do all of this whilst making the best use of resources and demonstrating a ‘commitment to achieving significant cashable improvements in efficiency and capability’ (Home Office 2007c, p. 35)

The introduction of Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) in 2008 saw yet another variation on centralised performance monitoring. According to guidance issued by the Home Office in February 2008 (Home Office 2008e), APACS introduces one national performance framework for policing, crime and drugs and although the
headline structure is different to the previous Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF), the overall process for selecting and assessing performance against local priorities remains broadly the same. APACS designed around a series of domains, much the same as PPAF, provides the framework for a national set of SPIs.

Whilst there appeared to be some clear flexibility to the determination of targets and SPIs, there is also considerable central control through the PSA Delivery Agreements. PSA 23 (Her Majesty's Treasury 2007) contains four priority actions relating to tackling serious violence, serious sexual offences and domestic violence; making progress on serious acquisitive crime through a focus on issues of greatest priority in each locality with a concentration on the most harmful offenders; tackling crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour in each locality and reducing re-offending through the improved management of offenders. The PSA whilst appearing to promote local accountability and local ownership of target setting and performance indicators pulls, back from the brink of full local autonomy. The PSAs suggest nationally set indicators around the serious crime element, and in relation to acquisitive crime, sets out expectations of further reductions in burglary, robbery and vehicle crime:

… but in accordance with the principle of promoting flexibility to tackle local priorities, the success criterion for the PSA is limited to ensuring that no local area has a level of the most harmful acquisitive crimes that is disproportionate when judged against what has been achieved elsewhere.

(Her Majesty's Treasury 2007, p. 5)

The PSA defines what it terms serious violent crime and requires forces to make returns to the Home Office in respect of these on a monthly basis. Likewise the PSA defines serious acquisitive crimes and places a heavy reliance on police recorded crime data as a measure, stating that there have been significant reported improvements (Audit Commission 2007) and commonality in crime recorded since the introduction of the
National Crime Recording Standard. At the same time the PSA acknowledges some need for comparisons against those crimes within the definition of serious acquisitive crime and those that are not. For example, between vehicle thefts and theft from vehicles which are defined as serious acquisitive crime and vehicle interference, which is not.

**A propensity to blindness**

The setting of performance indicators in the public service has been a contentious issue for some considerable time. Aside from ignoring other less easily measured activities, the publication of the indicators may alter behaviours amongst practitioners and managers alike. The impact of performance measurement and public sector managerial behaviour is characterised by one author as: a concentration on areas included in the performance indicators to the exclusion of other important areas; the pursuit by managers of their own narrow objectives, at the expense of strategic co-ordination; a concentration on short-term issues, to the exclusion of long term criteria, which may only show up in performance indicators over time; an emphasis on not being exposed as an outlier on any performance indicator, rather than a desire to be outstanding; a disinclination to experiment with new and innovative methods; altering behaviour so as to obtain strategic advantage and; misrepresentation: Including ‘creative’ accounting and fraud (Smith 1995, p. 200).

Evidence of these behaviours had been discovered during an HMIC thematic inspection into issues of police integrity and although not couched in the same terms, they were clear to see:

The pressure on forces to perform well, and demonstrate through high detection rates that they are doing so, has resulted in pressure on ‘front line’ service deliverers to ‘trawl the margins’ for elusive detections and generally find any way to improve the figures. Evidence was found of the boundaries sometimes being pushed too far and unethical practices operating,
sometimes with the emphasis on solving minor, easier to detect, ‘volume crime’ at the expense of serious crimes.

(Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 1999, p. 3)

In July 2004, in response to a written question from the Home Affairs Committee relating to the risks of focusing on targets, the Home Office stated its PSA targets set out the key outcomes that were planned to be achieved over the Spending Review period and whether those outcomes had been achieved. The Home Office went further: ‘the key risk in target setting is incentivising the wrong kind of activity. Targets must be designed to ensure that they focus on the right outcome, that they will work as intended, and that they can be properly measured’ (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2005a).

The Home Office appeared to be oblivious to the fact that the problem with the setting of targets and the measurement of the achievement of those targets would detract from other, no less important, services provided by the police. As Handy (1994) described, in what became known as the ‘McNamara Fallacy’, ‘[t]he third step is to presume that what can’t be measured easily really isn’t important. This is blindness’. Behaviours such as ‘Tunnel Vision’ described by Smith (1995, p. 200) and alluded to by the HMIC inspection report are evident in reports such as that of the Macpherson Inquiry into the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence. The report commented that ‘[t]he consistent message given to us was that the police and other agencies did not or would not realise the impact of less serious, non-crime incidents upon the minority ethnic communities’ (MacPherson 1999, p. 313).

Furthermore, following publication of the Macpherson report, an inspection conducted by HMIC into the way in which the Metropolitan Police conducted their murder enquiries were astounded by comments of officers who felt that:
... the investigation of the offence of murder was not a specific priority for the MPS. The rationale given by those interviewed was that public surveys had not identified the issue as a priority nor had the crime been made a specific government priority, other than as part of the Ministerial Priority relating to violent crime (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000c, p. 11).

The problems of performance measurement and performance indicators manifest themselves in other ways. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (MacPherson 1999) and other research (see Brown 1997) described how black people were far more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. Whilst not explaining the reasons behind the disproportionate use of search powers, ‘the advent of the explicit and comparative monitoring of performance’ (Maddock and Marlow 1997, p. 10) linked to an ‘Audit Commission report that proposed intelligence led offence detection and the Home Office key performance indicators [gave] added impetus to the frequency of the exercise of [search] powers’ (Maddock and Marlow 1997, p. 5). As Leishman and Savage noted: ‘To impose upon the organisation a priori aims and objectives is at best unrealistic and at worst damaging to the flexibility on which policing responses depend’ (1993, p. 219).

Inevitably the results produced are not always in the interests of justice nor do they reflect what public wants. Loveday was equally critical of the ‘government’s strategy of encouraging the public to judge police effectiveness in terms of league tables, ranking and performance measures’ (1995, p. 150). Furthermore the indicators used fail to recognise real measures of performance such as the police service’s ability to integrate with its local community and the degree to which the local community has confidence in its police. The police are constrained by performance indicators that place organisational performance above the individual who calls for service. Reiner concluded that ‘[c]oncentrating more efforts on ‘catching criminals’ might boost clear-up rates a little, but will not significantly cut crime. What it will do, however, is divert resources from a variety of jobs which the public call upon the police to do …’ (1994, p. 156). A more recent

Appearing to finally concede that top down performance targets were detrimental to service delivery, the Government proposed a single top down target for the police – ‘to improve public confidence’ (Home Office 2008a). The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee indicated that they were:

… pleased that generic targets for offences brought to justice and sanction detections, which encouraged forces to focus on the easiest crimes to resolve rather than those which have the most significant impact on public safety, have been removed from the 2008/09 statutory performance indicators (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008, p. 100).

Whilst the publication of a single top down central target gives the appearance of a reduction in bureaucracy and the relinquishing of control to local authorities and the police, Government have maintained central control through a reinvigorated HMIC. This arms length approach will provide HMIC, in conjunction with the Audit Commission, with a remit to inspect police authorities using ‘APACS and the National Indicator Set’ (Home Office 2008b, p. 30) and benchmark forces using comparative data such as ‘most similar forces’.
Chapter 5  Counting crimes: performance and crime recording

The National Policing Plans and National Community Safety Plans (Home Office 2002b, 2003b, 2004b, 2005c, d, 2007c) outline the Government’s crime control priorities over three years and a natural conclusion to be drawn from the contents of the documents is that crime statistics published in different formats are not only central, but crucial, to the gauging of progress. Although acknowledged as possibly the more accurate, the British Crime Survey excludes a number of categories of crime and victims (Farrell and Pease 2007; Home Office 2006b; Maguire 2002, 2007; Maung 1995; Statistics Commission 2006) and therefore as a consequence current crime data for performance measurement in a number of areas is drawn primarily from the statistics compiled by the police.

The purpose of the police recording of crime is addressed in Home Office publication ‘Review of crime statistics: a discussion document’ (Home Office 2000, 2006b; see also Statistics Commission 2006). The view taken by the Home Office is that the essential elements consist of providing a picture of crime and crime trends in society, shown at either local or national level, the informing of politics both locally and nationally, and enabling the police to manage resource demand. Last, but by no means least, is the ability of government and local politicians to measure police performance.

To achieve this vision, each decision made by police staff engaged in the recording process is critical to the formulation, validity and subsequent usefulness of police crime statistics. What has become increasingly clear is that the manner in which police statistics have been used as a gauge for performance management set aside the fact that:
… statistics do not, in some mysterious way, emanate directly from the social conditions they appear to describe, but between the two lie the assumptions, conceptions and priorities of the state and social order, a large, complex and imperfectly functioning bureaucracy ….

(Government Statisticians’ Collective 1981, p. 149)

Since 1856 the police have supplied central government with figures regarding crime within force areas. Section 54 of the Police Act 1964, later replaced by Section 45 of the Police Act 1996 contains the authority for the Home Office to obtain information for the criminal statistics from police forces, it states:

The Chief Officer of Police of every police force shall, at such times and in such form as the Secretary of State shall direct, transmit to the Secretary of State such particulars with respect to offences, offenders, criminal proceedings and the state of crime in the area for which the force is maintained as the Secretary of State may require.

With the advent of New Public Management within the police service, and the gauging of performance against set performance indicators whereby the Home Office, Audit Commission and HMIC have relied heavily on recorded crime and clear up rates as an indication of force performance, there has been growing concern about the manner in which crime statistics have been gathered. A report into the ‘Collection and Accuracy of Police Incident Data’, commissioned by the Home Office in 1996, stated, ‘There appears to be some variation not only in the number and type of events being recorded by the police, but also in the way certain events are interpreted for statistical purposes’ (Portas and Mason 1996, p. 24). As will be described post, the accuracy of recording of incidents has a marked impact on, not only the ability of the police to respond to crime, but also has a direct bearing on the accuracy and interpretation of research into the recording of crime and the production of crime statistics.
‘A Review of Crime Recording Procedures’ published by HMIC (1996) identified a number of issues regarding the recording of offences. In some forces the counting rules, governing the reporting, and recording of police statistics had not been amended in line with recent publications. Classification of crimes was also an area of concern.

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary in his annual report of 1997-98 indicated that there were marked differences in recording practices amongst forces. Mentioning work carried out by the Inspectorate in 1996, he pointed to the fact that recording errors ‘were in the main due to misclassification associated with a difficulty in interpreting the Home Office Counting Rules, rather than deliberate malpractice’ (1998, p. 19). In discussing a rise in violent crime he elaborated further: ‘The sudden nature of large increases, accompanied by a rise in crimes classified as detected by ‘otherwise’ means, strongly suggest that recording practices are responsible’.

Criticism of police data collection and the subsequent closer attention has also led to criticism over the subsequent micro management of police recorded crime figures, which has led to a veneer of respectability that does not necessarily reflect police activity or service provided to victims of crime (Hallam 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 1999; 2000b; Loveday 2000a; McLaughlin 1996). Previous under-recording of crime by the police service is well documented (see Burrows and Tarling 1987; Coleman and Moynihan 1996; Farrington and Dowds 1985) and the concerns of central bodies that comparative performance was hampered by the inability of the police to accurately record crime data led to further scrutiny. The ‘Review of police forces’ crime recording practices’ (Burrows et al, 2000) was one of three key pieces of work conducted in England and Wales in 2000 regarding the collation and compilation of crime statistics.

* Means other than charge or summons, caution, or TIC etc.
The results were the catalyst for a thematic inspection on data quality within police forces (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and taken together, these informed the ‘Review of Crime Statistics: A discussion document’ (Home Office 2000). Both the Burrows research (2000) and HMIC inspection (2000b) showed a significant under-recording of crime by the police.

**The National Crime Recording Standard: A new mantra**

Immediately preceding the publication of the HMIC report (2000b) detailing the manner in which police were recording crime, ACPO issued a press release blaming in part, the problems of crime recording on ‘the ambiguous and contradictory nature of much of the Home Office guidance … which has not assisted forces in achieving a more consistent approach to this problem’. In an effort to head off inevitable central dictum (Hallam 2003) ACPO stated they were working towards a National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) that ‘once implemented, will ensure that crime figures meet the standards of accuracy and comparability which the public is entitled to expect’ (Association of Chief Police Officers 2000).

‘In 2001 ACPO adopted [the] standard to be implemented across all forces by April 2002 (Pilkington 2002, p. 17).’ The NCRS was to promote greater consistency between forces in crime recording, represent a more victim-oriented approach, provide a fuller picture of crime and disorder in a given area and refine police performance measurement.

Supported by the Home Office, the NCRS was integrated into the Home Office Counting Rules and its adoption by police forces was subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission, commissioned by the Police Standards Unit (Audit Commission 2004a). The NCRS was to be part of the modernisation of the way in which statistics were presented providing ‘a clearer basis on which to judge the performance of government and police’ (Blunkett 2001).
Initial estimates were that, as a result of the introduction of the NCRS, recorded crime would rise between ten and fifteen per cent in minor crime categories such as criminal damage and common assault (Pilkington 2002). This initial estimate proved to be somewhat over simplistic with the overall recorded crime rising nationally by seven per cent but violent crime by a massive twenty-two per cent (Simmons et al, 2003). However, the increases in crime were even more significant in some forces where fundamental changes had to be made to recording practices. Equally apparent was the initial poor compliance in a number of forces (Audit Commission 2004a, b) resulting in further underestimation of the initial increases. Later reports suggested the estimated increase in police recorded crime to be in the region of ten per cent since the inception of NCRS (Solomon et al 2007).

Increasing bureaucracy, and adding to the already burdensome ‘audit explosion’ (Power 1994), forces employed a multitude of staff, including a Crime Registrar (ideally at Chief Inspector level or police staff equivalent) and deputy to oversee and ensure compliance (Home Office 2002a). As the NCRS was further developed, the concept of Dedicated Decision Makers were introduced to oversee and ensure compliance with the rules around certain types of cleared up crime, predominately those where there was a recognised risk of manipulation (Home Office 2003a). At a macro level a National Crime Recording Standard Steering Group was introduced comprising members from each police region and representatives from the Home Office, HMIC, Audit Commission, Police Standards Unit and the Crown Prosecution Service. Feeding into main group was a number of sub-groups. Underpinning this structure were the crime audits carried out by the Audit Commission and detection audits carried out by HMIC.

Subsequent research has suggested that the application of the NCRS and Home Office Counting Rules is overly bureaucratic and has stripped back officers’ discretion (Chatterton and Bingham 2006). The Review of Policing (Flanagan 2008), noting the improvement in crime recording data quality (Audit Commission 2007) questioned
whether in ‘some cases we have lost proportionality’ (Flanagan 2008, p. 49) and
advocated that more minor crimes should be recorded in a more concise way.

**Counting crimes: The devil in the detail**

The Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime determine the manner in which
crimes that are included in the Notifiable Offence List5 are to be recorded by the police.
In 1998, to reflect changes in legislation and to enhance the collection of crime data, the
Home Office replaced the previous rules (Home Office 1979; see Walker 1995). Further
major changes took place in 2002 with the introduction of the National Crime Recording
Standard (Home Office 2002a).

In a letter to the chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, Charles Clarke MP
outlined the changes to the 1998 counting rules, the introduction of which also gave the
opportunity to move to a financial year basis:

> The rules adopted from 1 April 1998 include an extension of coverage of
notifiable offences, … all indictable and triable either way offences, plus
those summary offences closely related to an existing indictable offence or
triable either way offence are included. The increase in coverage includes
firearms offences, common assault, assault on a constable and certain public
order offences. All offences of criminal damage are recorded irrespective of
the value of the property damaged. The revisions to the counting rules
incorporated the basic principal of one crime per victim. Thus, the collective
protection rule was abolished. (Hansard 1999)

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5 The Notifiable Offence List prescribes those offences that are required to be reported on by police forces in
England and Wales.
Whilst the rules are too complex to describe in detail, there are a number of pertinent areas that had a significant impact on the collation of crime statistics.\(^6\) One of these is the classification of a crime, which has historically caused the greatest confusion and difficulty, particularly where crimes are attempted, rather than amounting to the full act. For the purposes of statistical returns ‘attempts’ are generally counted as the full offence. Examples include an attempted burglary, which may be recorded as a criminal damage and an attempted theft of a motor vehicle recorded as a criminal damage or vehicle interference.

Because the recording and classification of a crime is reliant on assumptions of intent, anomalies arise when in the absence of an offender, the only information available is that presented by witnesses, or in their absence, evidence and an officer’s experience and professionalism. Previous ‘studies of police discretion suggest the defining and recording of offences is a matter of negotiation and relates to a constellation of factors’ (Heidensohn 1989, p. 7).

In an attempt to manage down crime figures, the difficulties in defining crime were compounded by individual force guidelines:

> Where no theft occurred during the burglary, *prima facie* evidence of intent to do such harm can be difficult to establish. In general only where the premises have been ransacked and the suspects disturbed would such an assumption be valid. (Burrows 1986, p. 18)

Evidence elsewhere suggested that in some cases crimes were being recorded in different categories such as burglary being recorded as criminal damage or other type of

\(^6\) See also Maguire (2002) for a description of the changes.
theft (Loveday 1996). Errors in the accuracy of the recording of burglary dwelling and auto crime offences were also noted by HMIC where ‘[s]ignificant variations were noted between forces, ranging from 50% of files examined being incorrectly classified in some forces …’ (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 1996, p. 114). Similar themes were to be found in a later inspection (see Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b).

Such practices may go to some way to explain why the 1992 British Crime Survey found that although a greater number of crimes were being reported to the police, fewer crimes were being recorded (Mayhew 1993). Other factors may also provide an explanation such as officer’s ‘general desire to “ease” the job’ (Burrows and Tarling 1987) by failing to record crimes and deliberate misclassification of offences (Loveday 2000a). Whilst the recording of the crime should simply be a matter for the officer attending the scene, the pressure to perform and to lower crime rates had become so inculcated that it has caused even those at the highest level in police forces to actively seek to influence crime recording outcomes.

Suggesting that pleasing statistics had become more important than policing itself, the following instruction from an Assistant Chief Constable was quoted in a local paper:

Where instrument marks are found on the window of a dwelling house the automatic response is to record the offence of attempted burglary and yet in law this would be viewed as a preparatory act and not an attempt … On receipt of a report of a car door being forced there is an automatic assumption that there was an intention to either steal the vehicle or its contents. No such assumption can be made and again the law specifically caters for these circumstances in Section 9 of the Criminal Attempts Act which is not recorded as a crime (Donnelly 1993).
A Police Complaints Authority investigation into recording practices in the same force found that the force recorded over 9000 crimes that never found their way into the official crime figures, indicating that the force’s crime recording policy ‘was designed to have the effect of artificially reducing recorded crime to a more politically acceptable level’ (Davies 1999).

The 1998 Counting Rules for Recorded Crime (Home Office 1998b) added vehicle interference as a notifiable crime and split the criminal damage category into damage to dwellings, non-dwellings, motor vehicles and other damage. The rules surrounding vehicle crime classification were less than clear despite the fact that the new vehicle crime categories were excluded from the Home Office vehicle crime reduction targets set in September 1998. The following guidance within the counting rules (Home Office 1998b) assumes that either the offender had provided the relevant information or, the police would be able to ascertain the offender’s intention:

A vehicle is reported stolen but not yet recorded by the police. The police recover it and return it to the owner, who discovers that items have been stolen from it.

1) the intention was to steal the vehicle. One offence of theft of a vehicle (class48)

2) the intention was to TWOC (Take the vehicle without the owners consent) the vehicle in order to steal its contents. One offence of theft from a vehicle (class 45) (which is the principal offence over unauthorised taking)

The 1998 counting rules required every reported notifiable offence to be recorded; however, under certain circumstances several crimes could still be recorded as one
offence, but the rules governing these were palpably clearer. However, the rules still contained anomalies allowing offences to be rationalised or downgraded and there was clearly still a lack of understanding regarding the problems faced by officers when trying to ascertain what the intent of the offender might have been and therefore what crime had occurred, if any.

A principle within the 1998 rules was that the recorded crime should be the same as that with which the offender would be charged. Although in 1988 common assault had become a summary only offence and been excluded from the Notifiable Offence List, the offence was reintroduced into the 1998 rules. In 1994, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in conjunction with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Magistrates Clerks, agreed a set of charging standards regarding assault cases (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 1997). As a result, assaults that by legal definition amounted to assault occasioning actual bodily harm (more commonly known as ABH) were downgraded at the charging stage to common assault and battery.

The downgrading of offences, by the Crown Prosecution Service became far more prevalent than upgrading, raising questions whether the practice was really in the public’s interest (Glidewell 1998). The combination of the charging standards and the 1998 counting rules resulted in confusion amongst officers on the street. Some questioned whether they had a power of arrest for an assault, which was by definition in law an ABH, but would result in a charge of common assault. The effect on crime statistics was twofold, offences normally categorised as ABH were categorised as common assault, dependent on an officer’s understanding of the rules, and violent crime statistics rose as a result of the additional recording of common assault.

A further notable aspect of crime recording involves the ‘no crime’ rules. These rules allow a recorded crime to be removed from the statistical crime count where, a crime has been recorded in error; a crime has been recorded that occurred outside of the
jurisdiction of the force that recorded it; the crime constitutes part of a crime already recorded; and additional information is available which determines that no notifiable crime has been committed (Home Office 1979; 1998b; 2002a).

A contentious interpretation of the ‘no crime’ rule, often applied in a variety of situations (MacCabe and Suttcliffe 1978), places an evidential burden on the accuracy of the information provided by a complainant by suggesting that ‘the initial complaint of crime cannot be substantiated’ (Steer 1980, p. 59). The most criticised usage of this interpretation involves cases of rape where the victim had withdrawn their complaint or the police believed the allegation to be false, despite the fact that there was no verification from the victim or anyone else that the allegation was indeed false (see Harris and Grace 1999; Lea et al, 2003; Newburn 1995; Smith 1989). The rationale underpinning the abuse of the ‘no crime’ procedure is resultant of a performance culture around detection rates. Where crimes cannot be detected, due to a lack of evidence, a suggestion that the victim may not be truthful or may be mistaken in their account is far more palatable than to be judged on a poor detection rate, particularly around serious offences such as rape. As found during an HMIC inspection:

… officers tended to use an ‘evidential and detection based’ rather than a ‘prima facie’ model of recording and generally applied an evidential test of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ to record a crime. It was further identified that officers tend to use a lower standard to classify a crime as detected or ‘no crimed’. The overall effect of this practice:

- reduces recorded crime levels
- increases ‘no crimes’ thereby further reducing the level of recorded crime
- increases detection rates

(2000b, p. xiv)
Although the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 2002a) had been altered to take account of the new NCRS they continued to be ‘ambiguous’ in a number of respects for example, around the recording of minor public order offences and racially aggravated crimes. These ambiguities clearly symptomatic of the nature and complexity of crime and the multitude of ways in which it may be recorded required further alterations to the NCRS and counting rules to mitigate differing interpretations by forces. Amendments in 2003 (Home Office 2003a) designed to clarify ambiguities resulted in the exclusion of a number of crimes from the recording process. As a consequence the resultant rules rationalised crime recording making data comparisons between forces easier but diluting the ethos of a victim orientated approach.

From recording to detection: A flawed link

Recording and detection statistics are inextricably linked, as was recognised within the 1998 Home Office Counting Rules when the rules governing the two were combined in one volume. The link is made even more profound through targets set by the Home Office in an attempt to drive down crime and drive up detection rates or offenders brought to justice, particularly in certain categories of crime. Some crime will be reported by the public and may be recorded and detected. Other crimes, such as public order incidents, are found by the police and dependant on the officers’ discretion may or may not become a recorded and detected crime. Detected crime statistics are, as with recorded crime, dependant on variable police policies and practices and are subject to manipulation to produce cosmetic improvement (Bottomley and Coleman 1995). Clear up rates change over time and categories are influenced by the introduction of new legislation or changes to Home Office counting methods, having a regulating effect on police activity. In some cases the rates are resultant of adverse publicity surrounding particular methods employed to obtain admissions (Bottomley and Coleman 1995; Loveday 1996)

Prior to the 1998 rules, crimes could be detected or ‘cleared up’ if: a person had been charged, summoned (irrespective of any subsequent acquittal) or cautioned; or an
offender had admitted the offence and the offence could be or had been taken into consideration (TIC) by the court. Additional methods include ‘other means’: where there is sufficient evidence to charge but the offender is under the age of criminal responsibility or dies before proceedings are taken or completed; or an essential witness dies or refuses to give evidence; or it is considered that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding with the charge, including where the offender is serving a long prison sentence (Home Office 1991a).

Until more recent amendments brought about by Statutory Charging in 2006, whereby the police are required to consult with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on all but a few charging decisions, the amended Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Code C. par. 16.1) required a custody officer to make a charging decision based on whether there was sufficient evidence for a prosecution to succeed. Such a charge need not have been for the offence for which the alleged offender had been arrested, nor did the act of charging guarantee an appearance in court. Instead in between the two processes lay what was often seen as a bureaucratic evidence gathering exercise, conducted to satisfy the needs of the CPS lawyers in meeting parallel performance targets.

Before the CPS was founded, the law allowed the police to prosecute if there was a prima facie case. This was a low threshold: there had simply to be evidence which meant there was a case to answer. [However,] the CPS will only bring a case to trial if it considers there is a realistic prospect of conviction (Rose 1996, p. 133).

The effect of this change was for the CPS to manage its own performance by the downgrading or rationalisation of offences, leading to a retreat from prosecution of all but the most serious of offences (Loveday 1999). Inevitably this caused a performance management dilemma for the police, whereas previously the charging of an individual was usually sufficient to ensure an appearance in court, this was no longer the case. A
consideration was for officers to circumvent the justice system, to avoid unnecessary paperwork, and yet still have the matter cleared up. Opting to have the case dealt with by way of caution or detected by ‘other means’ using a *prima facie* test circumvented the stricter evidential test required by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the CPS requirements (see The Crown Prosecution Service 1994). A study carried out by HMIC found that although detection rates had been sustained, over time there had been a reduction in proportions of charges, summonses and TICs and a greater use of cautions, post sentence visits and ‘other’ detections (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 1997). The 1998 Counting Rules subsequently brought the clearing up of crime in line with the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 compounding the performance dilemmas.

The use of TICs allows offenders to admit crimes and have them dealt with by the court when being sentenced. Such admissions, encouraged by the police to enhance clear up rates, enable the offender to avoid further arrest and separate penalty. In 1990, ACPO and the Home Office agreed that crimes admitted by way of TIC could be counted as cleared up at the point of admission, that is, prior to court appearance ‘providing the unequivocal consent of the accused is obtained by way of statement of admission and desire to have further offences taken into consideration’. Inevitably, since the police were able to count crimes as cleared up upon admission regardless of the eventual outcome of the proceedings, the police saw TICs as a convenient method and offenders were like minded: ‘The criminal is happy enough to admit them [TICs] because there is no risk of punishment and the promise of a small reward (Davies 1999).’

The offender is often expected to recall sufficient detail to enable officers to match the admission against a reported crime or, in the case of unreported crimes, sufficient detail to enable officers to accept that a crime took place. Since most TIC offences relate to acquisitive crime, and there is a strong argument for a link between acquisitive crime and the need to feed drug dependency, (Coid *et al*, 2000; Gossop 2005) the ability of some
offenders to recall sufficient detail of vast numbers of offences, calls into question the integrity of such a system. This is particularly relevant when there is no test as to the validity of the admissions and owing to the TIC process these admissions are rarely tested in a court of law.

Having initially agreed to ask for further offences to be taken into consideration during sentencing, there is no guarantee that the offender will do so at court and it is not in the interests of efficiency for the CPS or the police to pursue these further. In any event, all too often TIC evidence consists of an uncorroborated admission, making it unlikely that there would be sufficient evidence to secure a successful prosecution. Paradoxically, the offences are deemed as cleared up, despite the fact that the counting rules made it clear that the standard of evidence to support a TIC should be the same as that to support a charge.

For the purposes of crime statistics, the recording of TICs is split into two categories, those where the admitted crime has previously been recorded by the police prior to admission by the suspect and those where the existence of the crime was not known by the police until an admission by an offender. The former fell into the category of ‘primary’ detections and the latter fell into ‘secondary’ detections. The Audit Commission (1998a) definition is that ‘primary’ detections are cases where the police need to carry out an investigation to solve the crime.

Home Office guidance in respect of TICs required sufficient details to be provided to justify counting a previously unreported TIC separately. The rules concluded ‘no hard and fast rule can be given as to what level of detail is sufficient. This of necessity is left to police judgements in consideration of the circumstances of the case, the offender, past experience, etc.’ (Home Office 1979). This guidance remained in place until April 1999 (Home Office 1998b), providing a somewhat arbitrary and subjective basis for the counting of offences as detected by way of TIC. Not only was the detection of offences
called into question, but the recording of offences was also called into question in relation
to previously unrecorded crimes. To show an offence as detected, it has to be recorded,
therefore the clearing up of previously unrecorded crimes had a direct impact on the
number of crimes recorded.

This provided a further, but seemingly perverse, linkage between performance and
recorded crime levels and required police managers to carefully juggle crime figures to
ensure detection rates were maintained at an acceptable level, but at the same time, in
the case of previously unrecorded crimes admitted as TICs, not too many crimes were
recorded, so that the rise may be cause for concern. A simple answer to this was the
practice of holding back crime detections and feeding them in when suitable (Bottomley
and Coleman 1995). In April 1999 the Home Office Counting Rules were changed so
that previously unrecorded crimes admitted by way of TIC were no longer counted as
detected crimes (Home Office 1999). This decision was to be reversed later but there
was an added requirement that confirmation should be sought from the victim that the
crime had in fact occurred before a crime could be either recorded or detected.

Other clear up methods regarding the detection of crime were generally known as
detected by ‘other means’ and alongside charges, summonses, cautions and previously
recorded TICs these were counted as primary detections. Two criteria were particularly
heavily relied upon and lacking clear rules or boundaries for their application, were often
open to abuse. For example, it was found that sixty per cent of the rape detections in one
force were cleared up by ‘other means’ and seventy-five percent of these failed to stand
up to scrutiny in a subsequent inquiry (Davies 1999).

The rules allowed an offence to be considered to be cleared up when: the guilt of the
offender was clear but the victim refused, or was permanently unable, or if a juvenile was
not permitted to give evidence; and where there was sufficient evidence to charge the
offender but the police prosecuting department, the DPP or a senior police officer decided
that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding with the charge (Home Office 1979; 1998b; 1998c). Worthy of note is the fact that although there were minor changes within the new Home Office rules relating to cleared up crime, the Home Office had failed to take the opportunity of providing clear and concise guidance on the application and interpretation of the rules relating to crimes cleared up by ‘other means’. The most damning indictment regarding these types of clear ups is that the offences need not necessarily be admitted by an offender and were not subsequently tested in a court of law.

The ‘guilt of the offender’ was often proved simply on the basis of evidence of a victim who was unwilling or in some cases unable to substantiate that allegation in court. This clearing up of crime may even have occurred where the offender had not been traced or spoken to (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 1997) or when the offender had been spoken to or interviewed and vehemently denied the allegation.

The rule ‘there is sufficient evidence to charge the offender …’ was often used in cases where the CPS was unlikely to proceed with the case on the basis that it was not in the public interest to do so or would not necessarily result in a successful prosecution. In order to overcome the difficulty of obtaining a detection by progressing cases through the court by means of a charge, the police had the ability to circumvent the CPS by deciding that there was ‘sufficient evidence to charge’ and then clearing up the crime on the basis that there was no useful purpose in proceeding. The rules required the decision to be taken by the CPS or a senior officer or the police-prosecuting department; however, in reality this rarely occurred, as there was at the outset no intention to prosecute. Instead a senior officer, or in some cases more junior ranks, were presented with a fait accompli where the decision had already been made by the investigating officer and the case was simply rubber stamped. HMIC found that different forces had different levels of authority for the authorisation of crime detected by ‘other means’: ‘This ranges from constable in one force to superintendent in another’ (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 1997,
p. 56). The senior officer, presented with little choice, could either decline to authorise
the detection, almost certain in the knowledge that this crime will remain undetected, or
invariably authorise the crime as cleared up knowing that it was another detection on the
books.

During a study conducted by HMIC it was observed that seventy-five per cent of the
sample of crimes cleared up by way of ‘other means’ were of the offence category ABH
or common assault. In 1996-97, offences of violence against the person recorded by one
police force increased by seventy per cent over the previous year. The drive to achieve
performance targets meant that forces were recording crimes of a more trivial nature that
would previously have been dealt with by way of pocket book entry (Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of Constabulary 1997). The recording practices in relation to violent crime
‘provide a clear illustration of how the performance culture can influence the approach to
data collection’ (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary 1999, p. 19) and increase
detection rates. The reality was that, coupled with the problems of poor supervision,
officers under pressure to perform, were turning to these methods of detecting crime to
the detriment of other crimes that may have been relatively easily detectable but required
a lot more time and effort.

One of the most controversial areas in crime detection was that of ‘post sentence visits’,
more commonly known as ‘prison visits’:

The PSV was resoundingly rejected by all groups as being totally
unacceptable - unfair to victims, suspects and against natural justice – and
was viewed by an overwhelming majority as an under hand method of
‘solving’ crime, not least because it amounted to an immunity from
prosecution (Scripture 1996 p. 23).
The basis of post sentence visits is that the person admitting the offences is currently serving a custodial sentence and it would not be in the public interest to pursue those further offences admitted or, more to the point, no greater sentence would be imposed.

Almost ten years earlier Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Lawrence Byford, had addressed the subject of post sentence visits. In a letter to all Chief Constables he provided advice regarding the manner in which such ‘write offs’ could occur. These included circumstances where the person in custody had requested the visit; where after sentence evidence or information became available indicating or intimating that the person was responsible for other offences and where that evidence or information was not available at a time before conviction when an additional charge might have been preferred; where the person had earlier admitted offences which he/she later declined to have taken into consideration when sentenced and; on return of the person to prison after being unlawfully at large.

In many cases, prisoners were produced into police custody from a prison under the provisions of Section 29 of the Criminal Justice Act 1961 for a number of days to facilitate the clearing up of crime. The motivation for the prisoner was not only a change from the monotony of prison but as Sir Lawrence indicated, knowledge that they would not be sentenced further for the offences they had committed. It was of course in the interests of the police to treat the prisoner well, in order to facilitate a greater number of admissions, very much a case of *quid pro quo*. An examination in one force found that ninety-eight per cent of files scrutinised indicated that prisoners had been taken out for the day (Davies 1999). This was not uncommon practice as officers took the opportunity to drive offenders around in order that they could point out where they had committed crimes. In 1996 Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Trefor Morris, stated

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7 This became irrelevant after 1991 when ACPO in agreement with the Home office indicted TICs could be counted as detected following admission during interview as opposed to admission at court
that the authority for such productions should be the exception rather than the rule. However, because of the criteria for the productions, these had undoubtedly become the rule rather than the exception.

Offenders became wise to the fact that it was beneficial to admit offences under these circumstances. Unlike TICs, post sentence ‘write offs’ were highly unlikely to attract any additional penalty and became the preferred method of clearing the slate. It was not unheard of for prisoners to have admitted a significant number of offences and have these written off, regardless of the fact that they may only have been sentenced for one or two similar offences. Davies (1999) points to a more sinister element, that of crimes being accepted by prisoners that they may not have committed.

On the 22nd July 1996 Sir Trefor wrote a further letter clarifying that the reasons for conducting a post sentence visit were: to gather intelligence; to provide reassurance to victims; at the request of the prisoner; the further investigation of crime; and to assist deployment of resources. In the same letter he made it abundantly clear that ‘[t]he integrity of crime detection figures is of paramount importance if the police service is to retain public confidence and build on the achievements of the last few years’. What is clear is that HMIC advocated this ‘writing off’ of crimes during post sentence visits despite the fact that ‘indirect methods on which the police largely rely on to clear-up crime when information from the public is not forthcoming are notoriously subject to abuse’ (Morgan and Newburn 1997 p. 118). Paradoxically, HMIC inspections also indicated they had serious misgivings about the manner in which they were being applied (Loveday 2000a). Clearly, the reasons for post sentence visits were simply about increasing detection rates. Owing to the growing concern within the service itself and mounting external criticism from the media, within three years of Sir Trefor’s letter the Home Office announced that it would no longer allow the recording of crimes as detected if, they resulted from post sentence visits or were previously unrecorded crimes and had been admitted by way of TIC (Home Office 1999).
The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 heralded a new way of circumventing the judicial system. The disposal method, known as Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs), was introduced nationally during 2003-04 with operational guidance produced in 2005 by the Home Office (Home Office 2005a). The purpose of the notices was to allow officers a quick and alternate means of dealing with low level, anti social and nuisance offending whilst delivering swift simple and effective justice that carries a deterrent effect. The purpose was to reduce the amount of time officers spent completing paperwork and attending court thereby increasing the amount of time officers spent on the streets.

A subsequent review carried out by the Office of Criminal Justice Reform (Kraina and Carroll 2006) noted that there was displacement of offences. This occurred particularly in the case of the public order offences where a PND was issued for a Section 5 Public Order Act offence, rather than dealing with individuals for offences of drunk and disorderly or urinating in a public place. This report was further supported by other research where officers explained that ‘[t]hey get a detection for a Section 5. The offence is what we used to call drunk and disorderly’ (Chatterton and Bingham 2006, pg. 54). These actions bolstered detected crime rates but the corollary was that recorded violent crime figures also increased, providing a picture of crime that had no resemblance to reality. Whilst the issue of a PND is not viewed as a conviction it is counted as a sanction detection and an offence brought to justice.

In 2004, cannabis was reclassified from a Class B to Class C drug and in the same year ACPO introduced its guidance on ‘street warnings’. Under certain conditions offenders could be given a warning for the offence of possession of cannabis. This method of disposal was also included a sanction detection and an offence brought to justice (Home Office 2005b). New ACPO guidance (2006) issued in November 2006 clarified a number of issues but contained a significant anomaly. Only adults could receive up to two cannabis warnings before other disposal methods were considered, whilst juveniles (those under 18) had to be dealt with through the formal system of reprimands and final
warnings. Adults could be dealt with on the street but juveniles were likely to be arrested, bringing with that the taking of fingerprints and DNA at a police station and an early entry onto the Police National Computer database. Adults on the other hand, owing to the fact the data for cannabis warnings was held on local, not national systems, were free to collect no more than two cannabis warnings in each police force area before any formal sanction was imposed.
Chapter 6  Methodology

Research questions

Previous research to assess the validity of police recorded crime data, for example Burrows et al (2000), Farrington and Dowds (1985) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2000b) has its emphasis on the recording and reporting mechanisms within the police service. Within this research a significant reliance is placed on data collated by officers and staff in the ordinary course of their work. Other research, for example Steer (1980), MacCabe and Suttcliffe (1978) and Waddington (1993) is predominately observational. Although providing valuable insights into interactions between officers and members of the public or reactions to situations by officers, they do not provide any notable analysis of the views of service users after the reported event and subsequent police interaction or intervention. It is apparent that there is little recent knowledge about the views of service users and the way in which they, through their interactions with the police, affect the recording or under-recording of crime.

Despite being based on the same methodological approaches used by Farrington and Dowds (1985), there is a wide differential between the recording rates reported by this earlier work and those reported by Burrows et al (2000) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2000b). Burrows et al (2000) explain this difference as arising from the variability of the coding of data and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) suggest the differences in the findings to be resultant of ‘…different aims and methods. In particular, this study is based on an evidential model of recording whereas the MHB study and previous British Crime Surveys used a “prima facie” (allegation) based model’ (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b, p. 53). The significance of the under-
recording of crime by the police is viewed by HMIC as having ‘an adverse impact and undermining of: performance measurement; crime league tables; quartile league position under the Best Value regime; equitable allocation of Government challenge funding; the target setting process; crime and disorder partnership information sharing protocols; intelligence-led policing; [and] problem orientated policing’ (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b p. 55). Notably the list fails to acknowledge the possibility of any adverse impact on service users.

With such a clear emphasis placed upon the collation of police recorded crime statistics for performance purposes, the explanation for the differences in findings around recording rates warrants a more detailed examination rather than a cursory comment relating to ‘aims and methods’.

The review of the literature relating to the recording of crime by the police and the use of police recorded crime statistics as a measure of police performance led to the formulation of the following research questions:

- Are the perceptions of service users and police officers vis-à-vis the effectiveness of police intervention, congruent?
- Does a deviation from the rules governing the recording of crime have any effect on the service user experience and user satisfaction and would adherence to the rules alter that experience and satisfaction?
- Are the methodologies used in the more recently published research adequate to accurately reflect recording rates?
- To what extent did under-recording of crime occur prior to the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002?
Research design

The research was conducted in three forces following the publication of ‘Review of police forces’ crime recording practices’ (Burrows et al 2000) and ‘On the Record: Thematic Inspection Report on Police Crime Recording, the Police National Computer and Phoenix Intelligence System Data Quality’ (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and took place over a two year period in three forces between 2000 and early 2002. Owing to national impact of the HMIC inspection, I considered it likely that forces would fairly rapidly attempt to alter crime recording behaviours amongst staff. It was therefore critical to conduct the research as soon as possible after the publication of the findings of the HMIC report (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and before the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (Home Office 2002a) in April 2002. As expected, the subsequent introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard altered the approach to the recording of crime by the police.

The selection of the three forces was based on both pragmatism (see Denscombe 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) and opportunity. I had been involved in the inspection that led to the HMIC report (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and upon returning to my home force, two forces made requests for me to carry out an inspection using the same HMIC methodology. These forces agreed that I could use the data from the inspections to further my own research. The third force my home force was an ideal place to continue the research as I had ready access to data (Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

The three forces are typical of county forces in England and Wales. Force A had just over one thousand officers working out of three BCUs. The mainly rural county consisted of a population of just over half a million, mainly resident in three main urban areas. The county also has a main airport. During 2000/01 the force recorded slightly fewer than fifty thousand crimes, equating to approximately eight thousand eight hundred crimes per one hundred thousand population. The forces detection rate was twenty-seven per cent.
Force B had just slightly less than two thousand two hundred officers working out of four BCUs. The mainly rural county consisted of a population of one million one hundred thousand many of which were resident in and around the county’s city. During 2000/01 the force recorded slightly fewer than one hundred and five thousand crimes, equating to approximately nine thousand eight hundred crimes per one hundred thousand population. The forces detection rate was twenty-three per cent.

Force C had just slightly less than one thousand four hundred officers working out of four BCUs. The mainly rural county consisted of a population of seven hundred thousand, predominately resident in two main urban areas. The county also has an airport and two seaports. During 2000/01 the force recorded slightly over fifty thousand three hundred crimes, equating to approximately seven thousand three hundred crimes per one hundred thousand population. The forces detection rate was twenty-five per cent.

The national average number of crimes recorded in non-metropolitan forces during 2000/01 was eight thousand one hundred and eighty per one hundred thousand population. The national average detection rate was twenty-four per cent.

The research questions influenced the identification of data that would be necessary or potentially useful in trying to find answers (Maykut and Morehouse 1994) and the selection of the methods that were essential to meet the ‘objective[s] of the research’ (Moore 1984, p. 9). Since there is no single research method to suit all kinds of study (Bullock 1989), a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen. The advantage of this approach, and the drawing of data from different contexts, is that triangulation of the data was made possible (Bryman 1988; Denscombe 2007; Robson 1993; Silverman 2000). The use of these multiple methods also made it feasible to ‘address different but complimentary questions within [the] study’ and to ‘enhance interpretability’ (Robson 1993 pp. 290-291).
This mixed methods approach, combined methods ‘drawn from different traditions with different underlying assumptions’ (Denscombe 2007, p. 107) and emphasised pragmatic approaches to the research problems where whatever ‘tools’ were available and appropriate were adopted (Cassell and Symon 1995). Whilst the fundamental distinctions of ontology, epistemology and theory between qualitative and quantitative researchers provide the basis for the argument against convergence (Brannen 2005), the pragmatic philosophy rejects the notion that these ‘research paradigms and methodologies’ (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005, p. 376) cannot be mixed. The purely quantitative approaches based on a philosophy of positivism and purely qualitative approaches based on the philosophy of interpretivism (Cassell and Symon 1995; Denscombe 2007) are seen as complimentary, each having their inherent strengths and weaknesses (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005).

The traditions of quantitative research ‘focus on deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardized data collection, and statistical analysis’. Traditional qualitative research ‘focuses on induction, discovery, exploration, theory/hypothesis generation, the researcher as the primary “instrument” of data collection, and qualitative analysis’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 18). Utilization of both methods provided a better understanding of social phenomena and enabled the research questions to be answered (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005). I found that the use of mixed methods and triangulation of the data produced corroboration and elaboration and were complimentary. Contradiction, ‘where qualitative data and quantitative findings conflict’ (Brannen 2005, p.176) did not appear to be an issue. I gave careful consideration to coding frameworks and triangulated data where appropriate to do so to ensure the findings were valid (Cassell and Symon 1995; Denscombe 2007).

I used quantitative data, derived from police incident logs and self-completed questionnaires, to explain and describe decisions relating to the recording of crime as well as overall crime recording outcomes. The use of quantitative data, often viewed as a
more ‘scientific’ approach (Cassell and Symon 1995) where the research views aspects of that being researched as ‘objective phenomena’ (Jupp 1989, p. 27) is more concerned with reliability, validity and generalization in its predictions of cause and effect (Cassell and Symon 1995). It tests theory (Robson 1993) but is not just about statistical analysis and has itself an element of interpretation (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005). ‘[A]ccording to its critics, much quantitative research leads to the use of a set of *ad hoc* procedures to define, count and analyse its variables’ (Silverman 2000, p. 5). As I found later in the research, this criticism was particularly relevant where definitions of events were critical to the outputs that theoretically provided numerical explanation and description of the under-recording of crime.

To gain an in depth understanding of the social reality of both service users and service providers, I obtained qualitative data from the interpretation of incident logs, individual interviews, answers to open questions within self-completed questionnaires and focus groups. The qualitative techniques emerge from the interpretivist paradigm (Cassell and Symon 1995; Silverman 1993), which is concerned with description and interpretation of the meanings of phenomena to people in their social contexts (Cassell and Symon 1995). This data enabled ‘the social meanings, definitions and constructions which underpin actions’ (Jupp 1989, p.28) to be captured.

Furthermore, the research exposed the social world ‘as something that is continuously under social construction via social interactions by the participants themselves’ (Jupp 1989, p. 29). The methods used enabled me to obtain qualitative data that gave meaning and understanding of how social reality is constructed by ‘grasping the way in which individuals define situations, events and other’s actions, and also the way in which such definitions frame and influence their own subsequent actions’ (Jupp 1989, p. 30).

The scope and content of the study was constrained to some extent by the reliance on the nature of the data available (Hakim 1987) and practicalities around access to data,
researcher time, organisational politics and my position as a police officer and manager within the police service (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Edwards 2002; Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

I gained access to conduct work in two of the three participant forces (forces B and C) on the provision that I replicated the methodology used within the HMIC publication ‘On the Record: Thematic Inspection Report on Police Crime Recording, the Police National Computer and Phoenix Intelligence System Data Quality’ (2000b). This would enable these forces to compare the results with those reported in the inspection. Time constraints within the forces and limited access to data and research participants, restricted my use of other types of research methods. However, the methodology facilitated the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data in the form of incident logs, enabling later manipulation, analysis and comparisons of results to those obtained in the previous quoted research. The methodology also provided rich qualitative data from focus groups within the two forces and qualitative and quantitative data from questionnaires completed by the focus group participants. The third force had already taken part in the previous inspection and declined to allow me to run focus groups. I overcame this by gaining agreement to conduct a questionnaire-based survey.

I conducted semi-structured interviews to gain an in depth understanding of the social reality of service users. I considered observational methods but the randomness of the reporting of crime events would require ‘prolonged engagement’ with patrol officers to generate any meaningful data set. Taking time out of a full time day job for significant periods was not a practical option. There were also issues regarding my managerial role within the police service, my relationship with the officers and my duty to the public, particularly if incidents had not been dealt with appropriately. (see Jupp 1989).

I wasn’t able to take any lengthy breaks from full time employment so researching within my own organisation was the only viable means available to study the subject within the
time constraints (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Hewitt-Taylor 2002). Having been a police officer for nearly twenty years, much of it submersed in the ‘real world’ of uniform patrol and CID, I knew and understood the history and cultures of the organisation. I had a clear grasp of the jargon, the cynicism and the unspoken agendas of various groups (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Edwards 2002). I didn’t need to learn any of this, as an outsider would, I was able to carry out my research from a subjective, informed, and influential standpoint (Kanuha 2000). This immersion in the organisation does have its drawbacks though. There is tendency to overlook the familiar and miss the obvious because it is so commonplace. It is easy to take for granted assumptions about behaviour and during interviews fail to pursue vague statements and generalities (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Edwards 2002; Hewitt-Taylor 2002; Kanuha 2000). This is compounded by the fact that participants make assumptions you know what they are talking about (Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

A real advantage to working within the organisation was that I didn’t need to identify and try and persuade influential ‘gatekeepers’ to allow me access (Cassell and Symon 1995). Because of my knowledge of systems and processes and my unique position within my force, I had access to in-depth and rich data that would not be available to an outsider (Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

Being in such a privileged position also brought with it a number of issues. I had my own values and beliefs and I was immersed in the cultures of the organisation (Edwards 2002; Hewitt-Taylor 2002). I had to step outside of this when interviewing participants from both within the investigation and outside. Objective detachment was a problem as I struggled with my own personal beliefs and values (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Hewitt-Taylor 2002). I found a need to distance myself from the project, participants and process. I had to try to separate out my own experiences from those of the participants despite having feelings of empathy (Kanuha 2000).
Whilst I was able to empathise with colleagues, I also found myself frequently at odds with their views. This was something I came to realise more and more as I set about interpreting my data (Edwards 2002; Hewitt-Taylor 2002). What seemed to be acceptable practice, because ‘I’d been there and done that’, became unacceptable as I began to realise the impact of actions or inactivity. I found myself feeling angry, frustrated and disappointed about the way that members of the public had been dealt with by officers and felt they had been let down by a police service that I was part of. I very quickly became more aware that I was ‘part of the ‘reality’ under investigation’ (Hewitt-Taylor 2002) and began to reflect on my own previous actions as a patrol officer. Such emotions are under discussed in research (Melrose 2002) but they reinforced the need to try to maintain a form of objective detachment (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Hewitt-Taylor 2002).

My position as a manager, in part working for senior officers, brought with it issues when conducting focus groups and surveys. I was acutely aware of the power relationship between participants and me (Hewitt-Taylor 2002) and the need to gain and maintain rapport and trust (Edwards 2002). This required careful handling of conversations and an awareness that the relationship may have impacted on the data despite reassurance of confidentiality.

The process of writing up of the thesis highlighted a number of internal issues and dilemmas. Having been employed within the police service for such a length of time, I have immense loyalty to the service and its people. And yet here I was writing about organisational secrets and divulging issues that would normally be ‘hidden from the public gaze’ (Edwards 2002, p.72). Once again I had to maintain an objective detachment (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Hewitt-Taylor 2002) and step back from my affiliation to the police (Edwards 2002) to overcome my reluctance to expose views that might reflect badly on the police service (Brannick and Coghlan 2007; Hewitt-Taylor 2002).
Incidents and service users

The first component of the research was designed to answer the questions relating to service user experience, perceptions and satisfaction. To address these questions I considered both observation and interviews as methods of data collection. Steer (1980) and Jupp (1989) provide valuable insights into the usefulness and problems encountered when using ‘direct’ or ‘participant’ observation of police work. However, both also provide examples of when the participant observer’s presence becomes an influence on the outcome of events resultant of their own participation within activities (Jupp 1989; Steer 1980). One of the most commonly cited problems regarding observation is the so-called ‘Hawthorne Effect’, where the psychological response by subjects aware that they are participating in a study is to alter their behaviour (Handy 1985). Another notable problem associated with observation is that it requires ‘the prolonged engagement, over weeks or months, necessary to understand others-in-context’ (Maykut and Morehouse 1994, p. 70). This prolonged engagement, my role within the police service and a full time job made this research method impractical.

Interviews were therefore considered the most suitable option. ‘The interview is a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out’ and provides ‘rich and highly illuminating data’ (Robson 1993, p. 229).’ The production of quantitative data, arising from closed questions asked in the same way (Denscombe 2007), made structured interviews unsuitable. I chose semi-structured interviews as I had a clear list of issues that I wanted to address (Denscombe 2007). I utilised an interview guide (Denscombe 2007; Maykut and Morehouse 1994) to provide useful prompts during the interviews. The use of the guide helped to overcome one of the problems associated with interviews; the lack of standardisation leading to concerns about validity and interviewer bias (Robson 1993). It was not practical (see Denscombe 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) to carry out face-to-face interviews, given the nature of the phenomena being explored and the need to conduct interviews with service users across a wide force area in relatively short time. I therefore chose to conduct telephone interviews.
One of the advantages of telephone interviewing is the avoidance of interviewer effects (Robson 1993) whilst retaining the personal element (Denscombe 2007). However, it is more difficult to build a rapport and people may feel uncomfortable speaking for any length of time on the telephone (Denscombe 2007; Newburn 2007). It is also more difficult to ask sensitive questions at a distance (Newell 1993). The lack of visual cues is also seen as a drawback of telephone interviews (Newell 1993) but is mitigated by the use of probes and an ability to correct obvious misunderstandings (Robson 1993). Another issue is that certain groups, i.e. those that did not have a telephone or where a telephone number had not been recorded or perhaps were not available may be under-represented (Denscombe 2007; Newell 1993).

I conducted interviews with a sample of fifty callers reporting ‘possible’ crime events in force A. The analysis of their accounts and a comparison of these with the final comments and ‘results’ contained within the police incident logs, *inter alia* the police officer’s view, or account, of the event was intended to bridge the very substantial knowledge gap, referred to in Chapter One.

This component of the research was carried out between the months of September 2001 and February 2002, once authority had been obtained from force A. Employment within force A gave me ready access to documentation, people and data (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). This was a considerable advantage as I had direct access to the ‘command and control’ and crime systems, enabling me to identify incidents that appeared to be reports of crime and had not been recorded as such.

Prior to the main phase of the research I undertook a feasibility study, involving the identification of five incidents chosen directly from the ‘command and control’ system. Introductory letters were sent to the individuals that had reported the incident informing them of the research, that they would be interviewed by telephone and that they may withdraw from the research if they wished. At the same time they were provided with
information regarding victim support services and my contact details. Approximately one
to two weeks later, I contacted the person that had reported the incident to obtain their
version of events as they had evolved.

Participants were asked to describe the incident as reported during their initial phone call
to the police, what their expectations were and what they were told by the police operator. They were then asked what they told the attending officer, if one attended, and to describe the interaction between themselves and the attending officer. This was followed by questions relating to any action taken by the police, general views about the service they received and whether they thought that the incident they reported should be recorded officially as a crime. The prompts relating to the questions asked are reproduced at Appendix C.

This initial sample highlighted a problem with timings. Participants were vague about the
details of the event and the content of their conversations with various actors involved. The ability to recall events accurately is a problem recognised in general surveys (see Marsh 1982; Robson 1993). It became clear that I would need to reduce the time between the incident and interview.

In order to overcome this, I examined incidents in blocks of twelve-hour periods and having selected appropriate incidents posted the introductory letters immediately. A number of incidents fitted the criteria but some involved sensitive issues and had to be weeded out if it appeared inappropriate to contact the reporting person. For example, it was clearly inappropriate to call a victim of domestic violence if there was any suggestion they might still be co-habiting with the offender. Other incidents were weeded because no contact telephone number had been recorded.

At times incidents were weeded after several attempts had been made to contact potential participants but calls were either unanswered or I was told the participants were
unavailable. Because I had not made appointments to interview participants, I adopted a strategy whereby if the participant was busy at the time of the initial call, I arranged to call them back at a more convenient time to ensure that I had their full attention (Newell 1993). Despite having weeded a number of incidents, the sample appeared to be representative (Newell 1993) of the general incidents that were not recorded as crimes. Having selected incidents, I contacted participants by telephone, usually no later than seventy-two hours after the initial incident and using the same format and prompts used in the pilot, conducted semi-structured interviews which were recorded and later transcribed.

Using Framework Analysis, I developed a framework to capture the key themes and processes within the data (Richie and Spencer 1994). The adoption of this general inductive approach (Silverman 2000; Thomas 2003) allowed for the inclusion of a priori as well as emergent concepts within the analysis. Interviews were transcribed, thoroughly read, reread, coded and recoded to identify and refine themes or concepts within the text, allowing for the development of higher level categories and the exploration of the relationships between them (Bryman 2001; Miles and Huberman 1994).

I selected appropriate quotes that conveyed the core themes within each category and developed a matrix to map the range and nature of the phenomena, further enabling associations within the data to be uncovered. My intention was that this analysis, triangulated with the data from the other research components, would provide a better understanding of the difficulties faced by officers. This triangulation (Bryman 1988; Denscombe 2007; Robson 1993; Silverman 2000) allowed me to conceptualise (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) some of the key tensions in the recording of crime and the operational decision making process and its implications for professionalism and accountability within the police service.
Tracking incidents

The second component involved analysis of three data sets comprising incident logs, related to crime events, from the three different forces. The police, as with many other organisations, collate and record vast quantities of information for their own purposes (Hakim 1987). Such records provide a key source of data on events that are otherwise difficult to trace and provide an important source of data regarding decision making processes within organisations (Hakim 1987).

This pragmatic approach (see Denscombe 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Melrose 2002; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) enabled me to access, sift, analyse and process large amounts of data in a relatively short space of time using minimal resources. The random nature in which crime events come to the notice of the police, made the use of observational methods (Bryman 1988; Denscombe 2007; Jupp 1989) impractical.

Using this methodology I was able to undertake comparative analysis of the results with those from the previous research, particularly that of Burrows et al (2000) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2000b). This enabled me to explore whether the previous research methodologies were adequate to provide ‘valid results’ (Robson 1993) and thereby postulate recording rates. Despite this obvious advantage, one of the drawbacks of using incident logs is that members of police staff who generate the information on the computerised systems, may be influenced, either internally or externally, in presenting information in a particular manner. They may interpret information given by members of the public or police officers in differing ways at different times. This interpretation of information and presentation of data was also likely to have affected the data used in the previous research (Burrows et al, 2000; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b).

Whilst the data was not easily verified, some triangulation was possible utilising recorded telephone calls from members of the public to the call handling centres (CHC) or control
rooms. Burrows et al (2000) suggest that operators inputting data onto the ‘command and control’ systems generally accurately record the information provided by callers. This accuracy was also tested during the interviewing of service users who had reported incidents.

Between thirty and forty-three per cent of events or incidents reported over the phone to the police, which require police attendance, are crime related. The variation in the size of crime to non-crime ratios ‘probably reflects differences in the definitions used to classify requests to the police, many of which are complex in nature.’ The ‘greater proportion of demand are service calls dealing, for example with lost property, missing persons, sudden deaths, licensing and order problems (Southgate and Ekbloom 1984, p. 11).

The data set I worked was obtained during the months of June, August and September 2000. I obtained printed copies of 1000 consecutive incident logs from forces B and C and had direct access to 1000 consecutive incident logs on the ‘command and control’ system in force A. The differences in size and make up of the forces and local demographics meant that the incidents covered a twenty-four hour period in one force and forty-eight hour periods in the other two. I selected incidents that were ‘possible’ crime events using the ‘opening’ descriptions or codes within the logs. This selection was based on legal definitions of events and behaviours, the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 1998b) and my experience as an operational police officer, a manager and an auditor. Where it was not clear whether the incident involved a ‘possible’ crime event, I adopted a ‘balance of probabilities’ strategy.

This ‘balance of probabilities’ strategy differed from the ‘evidential’ and pragmatic approach (often hinging around what was ‘reasonable’ to be considered a crime) used during the HMIC inspection (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and the ‘prima facie’ approach used in previous work (Burrows et al, 2000; Farrington and Dowds 1985). Recognising the wide scope for interpretation of the data contained within the
incident logs, where I was still uncertain regarding the categorisation of events, I put the individual cases to two work colleagues. This enabled a consensus to be reached using the ‘balance of probabilities’ approach.

I then divided ‘possible’ crime events into subsets of ‘alleged’ crime incidents and ‘non-crime’ incidents. The latter were incidents where having examined the text within the incident logs and the final resulting codes I was able to determine that no crime had occurred, for example, accidental activation of a burglar alarm. Enquiries with officers and staff within the three forces and the information contained within the incident logs enabled me to ascertain where ‘alleged’ crime incidents should have been recorded as a crime. Following this initial high-level analysis, a coding framework was developed and each reported ‘alleged’ crime incident was categorised according to:

- crime type;
- day and time recorded;
- person type reporting the incident;
- incident opening type;
- incident closing type;
- whether the incident contained any reference to the caller or victim being intoxicated;
- whether the incident indicated whether the victim was a juvenile;
- whether the victim was a commercial or corporate concern;
- whether there were any comments to indicate that the caller/ victim was advised to call the crime desk or visit the station to make their crime complaint; and
- whether a crime report had been completed and how many crime records were required.

I developed the coding and categories as each incident was examined. Whilst a priori categories were readily apparent at the outset, others came to the fore as more incidents
were analysed. This method entailed re-examining all the incidents as new categories emerged or in some cases, where it became apparent that the grouping of categories was too wide and there was a need to refine and redefine them.

I conducted an exercise to track events, using the data from the three forces, from initial report to final recording outcome to ascertain whether each reported event resulted in the creation of a crime record. I undertook further analysis to ascertain what types of event, if any, were more likely to be recorded as crimes. The analysis of these data sets was intended to provide an overall synopsis of the extent to which the under-recording of crime occurred prior to the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002.

**Focus groups**

The third component of the research, involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in the form of questionnaires and focus group discussions with separate groups of detective and uniform officers from forces B and C. This replicated the work conducted during the HMIC inspection (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and enabled me to contrast and compare the findings from this research against previous findings, as well as complimenting data obtained from other research methods. One of the reasons for splitting detective and uniformed officers into separate groups was to mitigate issues of group dynamics (Newburn 2007; Robson 1993). Detective officers tend to be more senior in service and I perceived that they might dominate (Newburn 2007; Robson 1993) and influence the direction of the discussion (Krueger 1994).

Participants were selected to obtain a broad spectrum of experience. Difficulties in organising the groups (Fielding 1993; Newburn 2007) meant that they were inevitably made up of those officers that were on duty and available to attend. It was difficult to
discern those that were volunteers and those that had simply been in the ‘right place at the right time’.

Focus groups are an efficient way of getting data from a number of people (Newburn 2007) and consist of participants who have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group (Denscombe 2007; Krueger 1994). The focus groups enabled me to explore how participants ‘regard[ed] an experience, idea or event’ (Krueger 1994, p. 8) and provided an insight into the perceptions of police officers and their views of the effectiveness of police intervention.

One of the problems with focus groups is that of group dynamics where one or two members dominate (Newburn 2007; Robson 1993) and influence the direction of the discussion (Krueger 1994). The researcher may also have less control over the group discussion than they would perhaps have over an individual (Krueger 1994). To mitigate this, a questionnaire was provided to participants at the start of the interviews. This questionnaire comprising hypothetical scenarios required participants to decide and record whether they would record a crime or not for each scenario, along with the rationale behind their decisions. These questionnaires were later coded and analysed to provide an overall synopsis of decisions and rationale appertaining to each scenario. The use of questionnaires is discussed post.

Following the completion of the questionnaires, using the scenarios as a prompt, group discussions were held to explore and expand on the issues raised and the rationale behind decision-making processes. I found the use of focus groups to be a particularly strong methodology during the HMIC work. I also found that the discussions were enhanced by the inclusion of hypothetical scenarios, which tended to provide a clear focus and were undoubtedly an ‘icebreaker’ (Denscombe 2007). Additionally, using the questionnaires as a prompt for further discussion enabled me to maintain control of the discussions and lessened the opportunity for ‘detours … and the raising of irrelevant
issues’ (Krueger 1994, p.36). The degree of trust (Edwards 2002) amongst the group, given that I was carrying out the work on behalf of senior managers, may have affected the quality of the data (see Denscombe 2007; Fielding 1993), conversely, because I was a police officer and able to empathise with the group members the data may have been enriched (Kanuha 2000).

At the start of each focus group session, participants were individually given a written exercise containing hypothetical crime scenarios (Appendix F). Participants were assured of confidentiality in so far as no comments or written answers would be attributed to any one participant or group. Discussions were then held to explore how participants regarded each event (Krueger 1994), the crime recording issues and the decisions made. I made notes of the main points during the discussions and expanded on these at the conclusion of each session. I subsequently developed a coding framework to categorise the written responses from the participants and my own notes. This enabled me to develop key themes (Denscombe 2007; Richie and Spencer 1994) around crime recording.

Police officer and staff surveys
I used a questionnaire-based survey to obtain data regarding the ‘attitudes, values, beliefs and motives’ (Denscombe 2007; Robson 1993, p. 128) of staff around crime recording issues within force A. This method was a pragmatic (see Denscombe 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Melrose 2002; Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) answer to obtaining data within the force, given the lack of authority to hold focus groups. The method also allowed me to obtain data from a large number of staff (Denscombe 2007; Newell 1993) and had number of other advantages. It enabled me to ask direct questions of individual officers about why an incident had not been recorded as a crime and helped overcome issues of trust and rapport associated with my position within the force (see Denscombe 2007; Fielding 1993).
Questionnaires enable large populations to be surveyed and pre-coding can speed up the analysis (Newell 1993). Although they are generally used for gathering quantitative data (Newburn 2007) they may also provide rich qualitative data resultant of the use of open questions (Denscombe 2007). Self-completion questionnaires have a number of advantages, such as the removal of interviewer bias, interviewer effects (personal characteristics of the interviewer) and the ability to cover sensitive topics (Denscombe 2007; Newburn 2007). The disadvantages of surveys in general is that the data are affected by the respondents 'knowledge, experience, motivation, personality' (Robson 1993, p. 128) and their abilities to recall ‘even major events may be error-prone’ (Marsh 1982, p. 82). Because there is no opportunity to interact with an interviewer, questions may be misunderstood and go uncorrected (Newburn 2007; Robson 1993). It is also not possible to check the truthfulness of the questions given by respondents (Denscombe 2007).

To identify participants, I analysed 2000 incident logs and identified a sample of 100 ‘alleged’ crime related incidents that did not subsequently appear to have been recorded as a crime. Ninety-seven questionnaires were sent to officers and staff that had dealt with these incidents. Copies of the specific incident were attached to the questionnaires to reduce errors and assist participants in recalling the events (Marsh 1982). Three incidents were duplicate (matched) incidents; in these cases officers or staff were sent copies of the original incident and the duplicate incident. The questionnaires comprised two parts (Appendix E), the first relating to a specific incident and the second to general recording issues. Forty-six (48%) of these questionnaires were returned. An additional 165 general questionnaires that solely related to questions regarding issues around the recording of crime were sent to other officers and staff within the same work groups. This strategy had a number of purposes. It was intended to assist confidentiality by masking the identification of officers that had not recorded crimes thus helping to promote response rates (Newburn 2007; Robson 1993). It also provided an opportunity to obtain further data to explain crime recording issues. Sixty-one (37%) of these general
questionnaires were returned. Both sets of questionnaires, accompanied by an introductory letter and instructions were sent through the internal dispatch in sealed envelopes.

Careful consideration was given to the design of the questionnaire to ensure that the right questions were asked, followed in a logical order and closed questions were pre-coded (Newell 1993). The questionnaires consisted of both open and closed questions and I gave particular attention to the phrasing of the questions to minimise any misunderstanding (Denscombe 2007; Newburn 2007; Robson 1993). Despite these efforts, some questionnaires were either partially completed or not completed at all (Newell 1993). However, the returned questionnaires provided a further set of rich quantitative and qualitative data.

I subsequently developed a coding framework to categorise and group the data within the questionnaires. This enabled me to further develop key themes, and relationships of codes and categories within the data (Denscombe 2007; Richie and Spencer 1994). It also enabled me to triangulate the data with the focus group data, adding to the concepts being developed around the perceptions of police officers and their views of the crime recording process and the effectiveness of police intervention.

**Ethical issues**

Inevitably research involving the victims of crime presents ethical issues. Careful consideration was given to ensuring that confidentiality was maintained and that participants were not put at any physical or psychological risk (Denscombe 2007). Initially liaison was made with the local Victim Support agency and by way of an introductory letter all victims were provided with information regarding support services available. Care was taken to structure interviews sympathetically to avoid distress through the recollection of events.
At the commencement of the telephone conversation, clarity was sought to ensure that the participant was willing for the interview to take place. Anecdotally most victims interviewed were grateful for the further contact and interest. Consideration was given to the categories of incidents and whether certain categories needed, by their very nature to be excluded, as these would prove too sensitive or upsetting for the victim to discuss. Subsequently, in discussion with my line manager and research supervisor, it was decided to exclude certain incidents such as those involving sexual offences and those of a sensitive nature. Each incident was dealt with on a case-by-case basis and careful consideration was given to the inclusion of domestic violence incidents. Only a few of this latter category were included and this was only done on the basis that it was readily apparent that the alleged offender was not resident with the victim.

Acts or omissions by officers that may have rendered them liable to disciplinary procedures were also considered. Whilst a preference was given towards anonymity, an ethical protocol was drafted with my research supervisor and the force’s head of criminal investigations, whereby clear breaches of the law or acts or omissions that were likely to lead to harm to the participant would be discussed and where necessary reported on. A number of incidents were referred to instigate follow up action to ensure the safety or well being of some participants but no disciplinary action was considered necessary.
Chapter 7  Process analysis: From initial call to recording outcome

The police are made aware of crime events in a variety of different ways. This multiplex generation of information by its very nature presents difficulties in tracking large samples of reported events, particularly from members of the public, starting at the initial contact through to the police response and eventual closure. Burrows et al (2000) provide an overview of the typical model utilised by police forces in England and Wales relating to how reported events are transformed into police incident data and thereafter crime data.

The initial call or notification

By far the most common method that the police are made aware of events is through telephone calls, consisting of emergency, that is ‘999’ calls and non-emergency calls. Emergency calls are generally routed through a centralised control room or ‘call handling centre’ (CHC), although in bigger forces there may be a number of these servicing different police areas within the same force, commonly known as divisions, areas or Basic Command Units (BCU). Non-emergency calls may be routed through centralised switchboards or CHC or through local police station switchboards and local control rooms or a variation of the same. This combination of centralised and localised control rooms is commonly referred to as a two-tier system (Diez 1995).

In addition to the routing of calls to the CHC, a significant number of non-emergency calls relating to crime events may, dependant on certain criteria, but usually relating to minor crime, be diverted to either local or central crime desks or recording units where details are taken regarding a crime complaint and investigated over the phone (Audit
Commission 1993; Gill et al, 1996; Home Office 1995a). These units are usually not stocked for a full twenty-four hour period and therefore a variety of different systems have been developed in forces to ensure that the crime details are captured and input onto a computerised crime record database. Dependant on the force and in some cases on the particular station within a force, this may vary from voicemail, utilising enquiry office staff to record crime details, or CHC staff creating incident logs on the computerised ‘command and control’ system to enable crime desk staff to call victims back when they are next on duty.

Members of the public may also report events to police officers on patrol or by visiting the enquiry office at a police station. Crime events in particular, may also come to light through admissions during interviews with offenders or can be discovered by the police during their routine duties, either through patrol work or investigation of other crimes.

**Logging the call**

All forces within England and Wales operate a form of computerised ‘command and control’ system whereby calls, usually requiring police attendance, are logged. The system is networked across a force and is force specific that is, the system only usually holds data relating to that specific force and is only utilised by that force. There are disparate systems in forces across the country and very few are networked across force boundaries. The purpose of the ‘command and control’ system is to track reported events, more commonly referred to as incidents, and to enable the management of resources particularly in relation to the allocation of incident response to dedicated ‘response’ or ‘patrol’ teams. This function is primarily carried out by dispatching officers to an incident by radio communication. Although officers may also pick up the incident allocation from a computer terminal whilst in a station or have a printout of the incident passed to them when being briefed for that day’s duties.
The method of allocation of an incident to an officer varies according to the structure of the force and the way in which it handles calls for service. However, there are a number of common features. With a few exceptions, on receipt of a call for service, a log is created within the ‘command and control’ system by police officers or police staff, working in a central CHC or control room or a local control room. Non-emergency calls are typically routed through a switchboard to filter calls where police attendance at an incident is not required, whereas emergency calls bypass the switchboard and are routed straight to a CHC or control room operator, usually in a centralised CHC or control room.

Whichever manner the calls are received, they are dealt with by CHC or control room staff who, whilst talking to the caller, will obtain details of the incident and begin inputting those details onto the computerised ‘command and control’ system. At the same time the callers’ details will also be logged. A unique reference number (URN) for that incident is then generated; the most common terms within forces for this reference number is the URN, Force Wide Identification Number (FWIN) or Incident Reference Number (IRN). The incident is categorised to show an initial incident type, using an ‘opening’ code or phrase and will be graded according to set response criteria (Diez 1995).

Latterly an attempt has been made to standardise this criteria (Edwards 2006; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2005; 2007; Home Office 2006c). The initial log will contain brief details of the incident. The priorities of the CHC or control room staff in creating an incident record are identified as:

- To identify the location at which any police presence might be required;
- To produce a brief description of the caller’s concern (Which is typically done either by applying a formal ‘opening’ code, or a descriptive word or phrase);
- To grade the incident according to the police response required (codes vary but a widespread convention is to distinguish: ‘immediate response’, ‘as soon as possible’, ‘delayed response’ and ‘advice/help’ (Burrows 2000, p. 21).
Updating the log

As officers are sent to the incident, the log is updated with the details of the officers attending and any further information, either received from the initial caller or other callers, or from officers attending. This information may also be as a result of research conducted by CHC or control room staff such as Police National Computer checks or internal database checks, such as intelligence systems, on the address being attended or persons involved.

An officer’s arrival at an incident is logged and any further information that the officers provide from the scene is also detailed within the log. Finally an officer at the scene will provide the CHC or control room with a result of the incident. Common convention is that this is usually the first officer that was initially sent to the incident or the officer who is working that area, this officer will also become known as the ‘officer in the case’ or OIC. The result is usually provided via a radio message to the control room but may also be logged by the officer personally when they are next on a station by inputting the result into the computer system, by phoning the CHC or control room or by communicating the result in person to the local CHC or control room operator. These finalising procedures may differ when dealing with a crime incident and are further described post.

In general, the log will be updated with comments from the officer regarding his or her findings at the scene, and providing the incident has been dealt with and brought to a close, the incident log will be finalised by applying a number of closing codes to signify the final incident type. A CHC or control room operator may officially close the log, or the officer may do so on return to station, or in some forces this is carried out by a CHC or control room supervisor to quality assure the manner in which the incident has been dealt with.
From ‘command and control’ incident log to crime record

Where the incident involves a crime much of the same procedures apply, except that the attending officer should enable a crime record to be created in addition to the ‘command and control’ incident record. Dependant on force procedures and structure this involves:

- the completion of a paper crime report either at the scene or later, from memory and notes taken, which is submitted by way of internal post through to a crime recording unit, either centralised or based on the BCU; or

- as above but communicated via facsimile to the crime recording unit, either centralised or based on the BCU; or

- officers phone the crime recording unit, usually centralised, either from the scene, via a freephone number, or from the station and provide the details of the crime to an operator who will input the crime record onto the crime system. Where this occurs, the operator in the crime recording unit may close the incident on the ‘command and control’ system or may comment the log to indicate that the incident is suitable for closing by the CHC or control room staff; or

- as above but the officer leaves details of the crime on ‘voice forms’ (a type of voicemail format) for the crime recording unit to input at a later time. This may occur either as a result of the crime recording unit being closed at the particular time the call is made or may be caused by unavailability of operators during busy periods.

In one force researched, the creation of an incident also led to the creation of a skeleton crime record on the computerised crime system. Officers were required to report the incident from the scene via the telephone to a centralised input bureau. If they were unable to report by phone they were able to complete a paper record and submit this to
their BCU’s crime desk for input onto the crime system. Until such time as the crime report record had been updated on the crime system, the ‘command and control’ incident log could not be closed. Another force used ‘voice form’ procedures and the crime and the ‘command and control’ systems were not linked. Consequently the reconciling of crime records and ‘command and control’ incidents was not as systematic or as well regulated. The third force researched had procedures whereby centralised CHC staff closed incidents and paper crime reports were submitted to BCU crime desks. There was little or no reconciliation between the crime and ‘command and control’ systems and therefore no regulation, allowing incidents to be closed with comments that crime records had been or would be completed and no assurance that this was the case.

Separate crime and ‘command and control’ systems are a common feature in all forces except that some may be linked to a greater or lesser extent, dependant on the software and processes employed. Linkage of incidents to crime records is sometimes carried out by manually cross-referencing the incident number and crime numbers onto each system, in the case of linked systems this is carried out automatically.

At the time of the research, linking of crime records and ‘command and control’ incidents was a somewhat haphazard affair and varied in degree across forces. The computerised crime system fulfils three basic functions:

- to provide a reservoir of information from which statistical analysis of type, volume and trends can take place,

- to enable more immediate analysis of trends and locations to take place to inform local policing, and

- to enable the tracking of the investigation and its outcome of any one crime. (Burrows et al, 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b; Home Office 2000)
Upon input, each reported crime incident is classified according to type of crime, for example, burglary in a dwelling, robbery, theft and so forth. In two out of the three forces researched this classification occurred, following input, at the point that the crime desk checked the record and therefore the crime was not given any official status until this occurred. In one of these two forces, officers did not classify the crime incident at all; instead, a sergeant on the crime desk carried this out whilst in the other force this was carried out by any member of the crime desk following the officer’s initial recommendation. In the third force, classification was generally left to the officers’ discretion and the record acquired official status at point of input, although reclassification could occur when the record was checked, if the crime desk staff felt that there was clearly an error. Classification was ostensibly carried out in accordance with the then existent Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 1998b; 1998c) and was dependant on the circumstances of the incident and the definition of the crime in law.

Once recorded, crime records were either allocated out to officers or staff for further investigation or were filed with no further action being taken, dependant on certain set criteria such as whether the crime was deemed solvable. As new information was received or the investigations were concluded the crime records were updated to reflect their status. Once records have been input onto the crime system, staff working within the statistics department in each force drew off the data from the database to complete the required quarterly and annual returns to central bodies such as the Home Office, HMIC or the Audit Commission.
Chapter 8    Data analysis: Reporting crime, the initial response

Incidents within force A were examined and ‘alleged’ crime incidents chosen where it was apparent that they had not been recorded as crimes. Samples of incidents were selected and subsequent semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone with a sample of victims, people reporting an incident on behalf of the victim and third parties who had witnessed an incident. The interviews included obtaining a description of the incident, an account of the conversation with the police operator, the caller’s expectations at the time of the call, an account of the conversation with the attending officer, where appropriate, and their expectations following that encounter. The interview question prompts are reproduced at Appendix C.

Initial classification of the incident

The incident system operated within force A required control room operators to give each incident an initial classification. The system also allowed operators discretion to provide a brief description of the event being reported. An initial analysis was undertaken to assess the classification given to each incident by the operator, the type of incident recorded within the incident free text and the type of incident reported by the caller (as discussed during interview), the type of person reporting the incident and the type of victim involved. As shown in Table B1, this initial analysis indicated that nine (18%) of the incident log classifications allotted by the operators, could be grouped into ‘offences against the person’, eleven (22%) as ‘offences against property’ and thirty (60%) under other less explicit and more generalised categories. This latter grouping included seven (14%) incidents recorded as nuisance youths/nuisance behaviour, eleven (22%) simply as a complaint, six (12%) as suspicious, two (4%) as breach of the peace, two (4%) as
domestic disputes, one as a prowler and one as miscellaneous\textsuperscript{8}. For the purposes of the research ‘offences against the person’ includes the initial classifications, as allocated by the operator, of assault, offences against, offensive weapons, public disorder and threats made. ‘Offences against property’ includes the classifications of attempted burglary, break in progress\textsuperscript{9}, burglary, criminal damage and theft, and includes attempts to commit these offences.

Triangulation of the incident data and interviews showed that in nearly all cases (n = 48), the event as reported by the caller, closely matched the detail of the event contained within the free text section of the incident log, as recorded by the operator. However, in sixty per cent of the cases the initial mandatory classification applied by the operator was non-specific, failing to adequately reflect the reported event. For example, a close matched incident was one that was classified as ‘offences against: assault’, with free text of ‘Inf [Informant’s]\textsuperscript{10} son has just been assaulted by a group of youths who are outside location’. Non-specific incidents tended to be classified as complaint, domestic dispute, miscellaneous or suspicious. Examples of these included incidents classified as: ‘domestic dispute’ with free text consisting of, ‘Inf states that she has just been assaulted by her ex-partner’; ‘complaint’ with free text consisting of ‘7 - 8 lads shouting racist remarks at infor [informant]’; ‘miscellaneous’ with free text consisting of ‘Inf states that he has been assaulted by persons whilst they tried to steal his motorbike’ and ‘suspicious’ with free text consisting of ‘Inf states that he has just seen a mixed race youth about 19 years, white baseball cap on a push bike trying all the car doors on his street’.

\textsuperscript{8} Ekblom and Heal (1982) provide a detailed analysis of how incidents are categorised and suggest that a large proportion are in a categories of a ‘catch–all nature’ (p. 4)

\textsuperscript{9} A commonly used police expression to describe a burglary that is occurring at that moment in time. The distinction between this and a burglary or attempted burglary allows for a prioritisation of resources to the incident but the stereotypical categorisation of such incidents has been criticised as depersonalising the event (MacCabe and Sutcliffe, 1978).

\textsuperscript{10} Text in brackets added by author.
The initial free text recorded by the control room operator was coded and incidents grouped into crime types. Only one incident could not be grouped, owing to the lack of detail within the text. Further triangulation of the data was undertaken to match these offence types against the initial classification given by the control room operator.

Of particular interest were those initial classifications (60%) that could not be grouped under ‘offences against the person’ or ‘offences against property’. These classifications and their subsequent offence type labels are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of incident (classification)</th>
<th>Type of incident (as recorded in text)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breach of Peace</td>
<td>public order; public order/harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint</td>
<td>assault; harassment (4); public order/harassment; public order (3); attempted criminal damage; criminal damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic dispute</td>
<td>assault; public order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>attempted robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuisance behaviour</td>
<td>public order; harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuisance youths</td>
<td>nuisance youths; public order/harassment (3); attempted criminal damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prowlers</td>
<td>attempted burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>robbery; attempted robbery; vehicle interference (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-one of the thirty incidents under the non-specific classification group involved ‘offences against the person’, with sixteen of these involving offences that fell into categories of public disorder or harassment or a combination of both. The reasons for this disparity between the initial coding and the initial text may be explained by a combination of factors. As discussed in chapters 11 and 12, staff and officers indicated that at times a lack of knowledge of the law was a factor in their decision-making around crime recording; therefore, one consideration is a lack of understanding of the law amongst control room staff, particularly around public order and harassment offences. However, a number of the events appear to have been trivialised within the classification section, pointing to a more likely conclusion that the purpose of using vague, non-specific
classifications is to create an illusion of a less serious incident which could more easily be brought to a ‘satisfactory’ conclusion, whilst at the same time withstand any cursory scrutiny. For example, a robbery incident initially classified as ‘suspicious’ would be easier to close with a minimum of action having been taken, than an incident that was initially classified as a robbery. The latter would require at the very least that a crime record was created or would require a sufficiently plausible explanation as to why this was not the case and would almost certainly be an incident that would come under scrutiny from managers. This managing down of the seriousness of incidents helps to manage down workloads both within the control room and on the street (see Burrows and Tarling 1987).

A further explanation may that operator’s feel pressurised to make snap decisions in order to progress incidents and facilitate officer deployment. If the classification were not readily apparent from the description of the event given by the caller, it would be less time consuming and require less thought to apply a non-specific classification. The likelihood is that all of the above phenomena apply, dependant on the experience of the operator and the volume of work at any given time. Equally likely is the explanation provided by MacCabe and Sutcliffe (1978, p. 82) where:

… reports of offences alleged by members of the public [are] formalised around certain conceptions of stereotyped incidents, the very words for which suggest depersonalisation which seems to be, for the police, their characteristic: ‘breaks’, ‘domestics’, ‘damage’, ‘hooliganism’.

It is clear that initial classifications allocated to incidents by control room operators are an unreliable source of data and do not always reflect the totality of the incident being reported. Therefore, ‘possible’ allegations (Burrows et al, 2000; Farrington and Dowds 1985) may often de facto be ‘definite’ allegations and therefore crimes.
Accuracy of the initial incident log text

Of the two incident logs where the initial classification did not match the free text, one involved an ongoing case of harassment and the other an assault.

In the harassment case, the initial log commenced by the operator stated: ‘inf wishes it logged that her ex-boyfriend has been to her place of work today and only when she said her boss was coming did he leave. Ongoing harassment’. When interviewed the victim explained: ‘I just told the operator that Mr [name] had come into my workshop and followed me home …. It was just to basically put it on record just in case something does like occur’. The victim believed she had also told the operator about an injunction that had been in place: ‘… and they said to, basically find, you know get in touch with your solicitor and make sure, you know its still, you know aware of it, the situation’.

This incident was closed by the operator as ‘information only/domestic dispute’ without the victim being seen by a police officer. Whilst the victim had expressed a wish for the police to only log the incident, when interviewed she provided details of a history of abuse and harassment by an ex-partner. It was apparent that she believed she was being victimised again because the civil injunction she had obtained had expired: ‘… he was harassing me at work and all that sort of thing because I’d actually stopped him coming in the areas where I was like working … so I was wondering if the injunction’s up that’s why he did what he did’.

The second incident that did not closely match the event described by the caller involved an adult victim and caller that appeared to be slightly inarticulate\(^\text{11}\). The victim’s wife had phoned the police and the operator had commenced the incident log: ‘Inf states that kids

\(^{11}\) It was apparent to the researcher that both husband and wife had difficulty in expressing themselves. However, both had a story to tell which, with a little patience was elucidated.
have been knocking on the door, when her husband answered the door the kids stuck a
BB gun in his face, happened 1 min ago’. When interviewed, the wife described what
happened when she spoke to the operator: ‘I said my husband’s been shot with a BB gun
… well they got the police is on the way is what they said. When I said to them will I get
in trouble [for dialling 999], there’s somebody on the way that’s all she said’.

In both incidents, the initial incident details match the actual incident but fall short of
providing the detail supposedly given by the reporting person. Given that nearly all of the
incidents closely match the detail, it is unlikely that any weight can be given to the
omissions but as will be seen later, certainly in relation to the second incident, the lack of
detail at the commencement of the incident log is merely indicative of wider issues.

Aside from ascertaining whether the opening text within the incident log corresponded
with the account given, the incident logs were also examined and compared to the
interviews to ascertain whether the initial incident, as reported, accurately captured the
interviewee’s version of events and the offences allegedly committed. Whilst all the
incidents appeared to capture the events in some form or another, there were notable
exceptions where the interviewees detailed events not captured by the initial classification
and free text of the incident logs. This may well have occurred simply because the
person reporting the incident did not provide the full detail of the incident to the operator
or because of the need for brevity within the text of the logs.

It is worth noting that the incident logs are predominately commenced and maintained to
manage and allocate resources to reported incidents. The main purpose of the free text
and classifications is to provide an officer responding to the incident with sufficient detail
to understand what they are attending and to enable the incident to be managed within
the control room environment. There is an expectation that the attending officer should,
in most cases, capture the main description of the event. However, as detailed post, the
comparison of the interviews and the incident logs simply reinforced the initial
assessment that each of the incidents examined was invariably a report of at least one crime event. One such incident was commenced: ‘Callers [sic] daughter was walking home this evening and was approached by a group of five youths. They grabbed her by the neck and hit her’.

During interview, when the reporting person, the mother of the victim, was asked what she had told the police operator, the detail she provided was much the same as the account recorded above, although further probing revealed that the group had surrounded her, asked for cigarettes, taken her bag and searched it and then assaulted her (see Interview 1, Appendix D). The interviewee went on to describe an event that occurred the previous year ‘… and also one of these girls … actually grabbed my daughter got a tie and wrapped it round her neck and were pulling on this tie’.

Whilst the initial call appeared to be simply about an assault and was initially classified by the operator as ‘offences against’, the interview revealed this to be at the very least an attempted robbery and indicated that the victim had been subject to bullying previously by the same offenders. Another such incident described about ten youths ‘… throwing stones at caller’s window. Whilst on the phone two stones could be heard hitting a window. This has been going on for half an hour. Caller is in tears. She is disabled and unable to approach them’.

The interviewee’s account of the incident was in accord with the incident log text. However, as the interview revealed, this was more than just ‘nuisance youths’ as indicated in the initial classification of the incident by the control room operator. As the interviewee stated ‘… we have had similar problems ongoing for twelve months now and that obviously several teams of officers have obviously attended at different times’. Having stated that another resident’s window had been smashed by the same group of youths on this occasion the interviewee went on to explain ‘… I mean it’s the first time they tried to break them with stones, usually it’s bottles of, plastic bottles with stupid
yoghurt drinks in or eggs or apples or that sort of thing….’ She then described how they had thrown stones at her because she had gone outside to try to take a photo of them. The incident log was closed as ‘nuisance youths’ and showed that an area search had been carried out. The log also contained the text ‘no damage to caller’s hse [sic], damage to neighbours, however didn’t want to make complaint, PNB [pocket note book] signed, 1 male stop checked, ASNT [area search no trace]’. This incident was one in a catalogue of events within which several notifiable offences were evident. The most obvious was the criminal damage and attempted criminal damage to two separate properties. Alongside this though, was a clear case of harassment and an assault\textsuperscript{12} coupled with behaviour that would have amounted to a public order offence.

Another example where the incident log did not fully reflect the incident was one recorded as ‘nuisance youths’ where the initial incident text stated: ‘caller reporting female youths have just thrown eggs at her front window again. They ran off towards the park. One only described as tall with long dark hair. Caller is elderly and said she felt very distressed as this keeps happening’. The details provided by the interviewee revealed that once again this was not an isolated incident: ‘the [previous night] I had two eggs thrown and then the cheeky little devils they knocked my door and as I opened it … an egg came whizzing by me into the hall’.

The interviewee, an 80 year old lady, went on to describe how ‘… it was aimed to come in the door as I opened it, that was the intention, so it may have been at, directed at me’. From the details provided it was clear that this was more than a case of ‘nuisance youths’ and one that amounted to a possible harassment and a likely assault given the circumstances in which the missile was thrown.

\textsuperscript{12} The throwing of stones at the victim could be classed as an assault if the intention was to intentionally or recklessly cause another to apprehend immediate and unlawful personal violence, see (Fagan v Metropolitan Police Commissioner [1968] 3 All ER 442, QBD).
A final example worthy of note also involved an initial classification of ‘nuisance youths’.

The initial text of the incident log read:

Inf [informant] is terrified to park car at H/A as there are 4 youths 17YRS waiting outside. Inf said they have threatened him and kicked his car as he left location 1/2 HR ago. He is waiting at top of road too afraid to return. Inf is in VX Astra [index]. Inf feels they know he is weak and will take his car and attack him.

When interviewed the victim reported a history of ongoing harassment and threats from youths in the area (see Interview 2, Appendix D). They had on numerous occasions, confronted and threatened him, tried to damage his vehicle and threatened to steal it and rung his flat buzzer: ‘and you get to the point where I daren’t go out because there’s a bunch of eight or nine kids out there and there’s nothing I can do on my own against them’.

The description of events given by the interviewee left no doubt that this was a case of harassment and also involved public order offences as well as an attempted damage to his vehicle. Despite having informed the police of numerous incidents, the end result of this particular incident was ‘no offences disclosed: nuisance youths’.

One of the issues of matching the details of the incident to the description of the event by the caller is that of interpretation. According to Waddington (1993, p. 17) the call taker needs to probe behind what they have been told by the caller to reconstruct the circumstances and in so doing rely ‘upon beliefs and assumptions about typical callers and incidents’. This may in part explain the use of some of the ambiguous and stereotypical (MacCabe and Sutcliffe 1978) phrases such as ‘domestic’ and ‘nuisance youths’ affecting the manner in which the incident is viewed and urgency of response given.
Identifying who reports incidents

Of the fifty reports examined, the incident was reported in person by victims in twenty-eight (56%) cases, by a third party not involved in the incident, in fourteen cases (28%) and by a person acting on behalf of the victim in eight cases (16%). Four of the latter cases involved reports by adults on behalf of juvenile victims. Of the fourteen incidents that were reported by a third party, twelve involved ‘offences against property’ and one, nuisance youths. Four ‘offences against property’ incidents involved a company or a corporation. It was unclear who the victim was in three cases, involving vehicle interference. In two of these cases it was apparent that the attendant officers had not made any attempt to trace the victims.

Further work was undertaken to analyse both the incident data and the interview data to draw out further information about the victims. Notably, thirteen of the adult victims were elderly and invariably vulnerable. Half of these victims were subjected to harassment and public order type offences, usually but not always, involving youths.

A typical example of an incident log initiated by a control room operator was one already quoted previously: ‘Youths are throwing stones at caller’s window…. She is disabled and unable to approach them’. When interviewed, the victim explained, ‘… we are a small community, its all sheltered accommodation and elderly and disabled … I was feeling very frightened. I’m disabled myself and I was feeling very vulnerable at the time’.

Another example of an incident log was ‘Inf reporting a [name] has been throwing dog muck and stones at her windows all day. She has just come out of hospital and her husband is sick and she cannot take anymore from this boy’. When interviewed the victim revealed, ‘… I’ve just come out of hospital I’ve had a hip replacement, so I mean I can’t get outside very quick you see … I’ll be eighty-two in November’.
Two of the adult victims were from a minority ethnic group, and one adult victim appeared to be somewhat inarticulate when interviewed. Nonetheless with patience it was possible to elucidate their story of the events that had occurred. Of the juvenile victims, two were from minority ethnic groups, in both cases the adult reporting the incident was from a minority ethnic group. Four of the victims were either a company or corporation. An overall synopsis of the victim types would suggest that at least seventeen (34%) of the incidents involved victims who could be described as vulnerable, that is either elderly or juveniles. This figure excludes those incidents that involved domestic type events where the victim may well also fall within this description and those events that involved minority ethnic groups and other vulnerable adults.

**Initial police response to the incident report**

Analysis was undertaken focusing on the police operator response as viewed by the person reporting the incident. Of the fifty incidents reported, six of the interviewees stated that they had simply wanted or expected the incident to be logged by the operator. All of the incidents involved adult victims, four of which were reported by the victim, one by a person acting on behalf of the victim and one by a third party. The incidents involved an attempted burglary, an attempted robbery, two harassment cases, nuisance youths and threats to cause criminal damage.

In two cases the interviewee claimed the operator was not clear about what they would do regarding the call. In four cases the incident was graded as requiring a ‘telephone resolution’ and two were graded as requiring a ‘routine’\(^{13}\) response. In an attempted robbery case, the interviewee explained that although he not expected to see a police officer: ‘I just thought I’d better report it just in case anyone else round that area, they

\(^{13}\) ‘Routine’ response is a grading given to an incident by a control room operator where there is no immediacy in attendance.
could like just have a look round now and again …. Yeah I thought well they’ll probably
send a car down there to have a look round or you know there’s not much they can really
do’.

The victim of the attempted burglary had not thought to phone the police until later that
evening, despite having been informed by their next-door neighbour in the early hours of
the morning that someone had been seen attempting to enter the victim’s house via the
rear patio doors. Asked what she had told the operator she replied, ‘I just told them what
had happened and just said that a neighbour had said that I should be phoning them up
just so they can log it’. The victim said that she had not expected a police officer to visit
her and had been told by the operator that she should report such incidents straightaway
in the future.

In one case of harassment, a constable created the incident log, having received the
complaint in person at the police station. The ongoing harassment, involving an ex-
partner, had been reported by the victim in another police area who were supposedly
dealing with the previous incidents and therefore the victim was referred back to the
original force. His only expectation was that the latest event would be logged within the
force where he was now resident. Likewise, the person reporting the threats to cause
damage only had expectations that the police would log the incident.

Whilst the expectations of the victims or persons reporting the events appear to have
been met in terms of the call being logged, it was readily apparent that in most cases a
crime had been committed and in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules
(Home Office 1998c) should have been recorded. This may not have been the case in
relation to the harassment offence as it was a continuance of previous behaviour and
should, in theory, have been recorded in the other police area.
In twenty-five cases, the interviewees stated that the response to their call from the operator was that they would ‘send an officer straight away’. This was commensurate with the grading of the incident logs where the log was either graded as requiring ‘immediate’ or ‘high’ response\textsuperscript{14}. This grading system has now been superseded by a nationally recognised system (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2005)\textsuperscript{15}. In only two cases where the operator stated they would send an officer straight away was the incident log graded as ‘routine’.

In thirteen cases, the interviewees stated that the response from the operator was that they would send an officer but it did not appear to be urgent. However, despite this, in one case of assault on a juvenile reported by his mother, the incident was graded as requiring ‘immediate’ response. The incident had only just occurred and it was reported that the youths were outside the house. In another case reported by a third party and involving an assault on juveniles, where a bottle of white liquid was thrown at the juveniles from a passing car, the caller had been told that the police would be attending. In fact the incident was changed from a ‘routine’ response grading to a ‘telephone resolution’ grading and closed as ‘community problems’. The incident log notes that there were no units available to attend at that time and there had been no further calls regarding the incident.

Two other incidents were graded as ‘telephone resolution’ despite the fact that the caller had been informed that the police would be attending. One involved a case of harassment where the caller requested the attendance of the police to move on a group of children. This incident was downgraded from ‘routine’ response to ‘telephone resolution’ and closed as ‘community problems’. There is no explanation for the

\textsuperscript{14} incidents graded as ‘immediate’ response required a response straightaway. Those graded as ‘high’ required a response as soon as possible and usually within thirty minutes.

\textsuperscript{15} See Waddinton (1993) for a further explanation and discussion regarding incident grading.
downgrading, although the incident log does note that the informant did not wish to be visited and had been advised to report the matter at the police station the following day. Another incident already discussed ante involved a report from an elderly person regarding stones thrown at her window. The lady when interviewed explained:

I did dial 999 because as you know your call centre was taking a long time to answer and I was told by that 999 officer that it was not life and death and could I ring the normal number and I just wondered, you know, what are you supposed to do if you’re feeling frightened and vulnerable when you’ve got a gang of ten or plus [outside].

Most of the incidents that were initially graded as ‘routine’, where the operator had stated they would send an officer to the scene, were cases that did not require a quick response; therefore, the initial response and grading was commensurate with the incident.

However there were two exceptions. The first involved a case already discussed involving an elderly lady and ‘nuisance youths’ throwing eggs at her house. Whilst not appearing to be the most serious of crimes, in deciding the response grading consideration should have been given to the age of the victim, her distress and that the offenders were apparently still in the area. However, the initial classification of ‘nuisance youths’ and the grading of the incident as ‘routine’ suggest the operator did not view this as requiring speedy attendance. The initial incident free text does not capture the fact that the victim was assaulted by virtue of an egg being thrown at her. It is not clear whether she mentioned this to the operator at the time.

The second incident involved a group of youths attempting to gain entry to a house. The victim, phoning from his mobile phone provided the operator with details who initiated the incident log as:
Inf stating offenders who beat him up a couple of days ago are outside his house attempting to gain entry. Inf states there are 10 –12 IC4 males at location. Parents getting exited [sic] in background. Inf advising offenders are trying to break door down nothing can be heard in background.

This incident was initially given a classification of ‘complaint’ and graded as requiring a ‘routine’ response. Within two minutes of the initial call being received, a second call was received from the parents and another operator commenced a second log. The log text was almost identical: ‘Group of 10 IC4 males are after son, they are at the front door now and have threatened to kick the door in’. This incident log was initially classified as ‘concern safety’ and graded as requiring a ‘high’ response. The two logs were matched within a few minutes of receipt of the calls and officers were at the location within fourteen minutes of the initial call.

It is interesting to note the different classifications and different grading given to the same incident when the two operators had been given the same information but by two different callers. When the eighteen year old victim was asked to describe the response by the operator he replied, ‘… no like taking their time just asking me long questions you know, taking their time like and I goes to them look can you hurry up, they goes don’t tell us to hurry up …’. Whether the attitude of the victim or the operator at the time had any bearing on the classification and response grading is a matter of conjecture but the interaction, from the victim’s point of view, indicated that there was clearly an issue with obtaining any sense of urgency.

Of the fifty interviewees, five when interviewed suggested that the operator had been reluctant to send an officer and had either given the impression that the incident was trivial in nature and not worthy of a police response, or that the police could not do anything about the incident or that the police were simply too busy. These cases
involved harassment, assault, criminal damage, robbery and vehicle interference. Two cases involved juveniles and were reported by adults acting on their behalf and two involved elderly victims. One of these incidents has already been discussed ante and relates to a report of assault and attempted robbery where a young girl had been subject of bullying (see Interview 1, Appendix D). The interviewee, mother of the daughter, stated that the operator was less than enthusiastic, ‘I told them and at first they were like, ‘oh okay fine, it’s logged’. She was left with the impression that the operator would send someone out simply to pacify her.

Another incident involving a juvenile concerned a robbery where a six year old child was pushed off his bicycle by an older male and the bicycle was taken. The bicycle was later recovered by another youth and returned. The interviewee described how she had difficulty in getting through to the police and when she did they simply said that they would keep an eye out and that if the offender was seen again they were to be contacted. She voiced concerns that because of the area she lived in the police would not be interested in the crime (see Interview 3, Appendix D).

When an elderly resident phoned the police regarding an egg thrown at her window she stated the operators response was:

Well she was very helpful, she, its true what she said ... well we can't really do anything because I've got no proof or is there anything like that. But she said she’d log it and if it happens again, then they’d certainly send somebody out ... to me .... I was more concerned because it’s not, you know ... an isolated incident ....

Another incident involving an elderly victim was reported by a neighbour. The incident log describes ‘5 or 6 boys aged between 12 – 14 Yrs jumping all over the roof of her neighbour’s car a red metro. The neighbour is in his house, he is an OAP and is not
aware of what’s going on’. Whilst the incident was initially classified as a ‘complaint’ and given an initial grading of ‘routine’ it was closed as ‘nuisance youths’ and the text added ‘No further calls – can be reopened if any damage found’. At the time the call was made, the log was commented ‘no units’ and no further action appears to have been taken until some four hours later when the incident was closed. When interviewed the interviewee described the operator’s response: ‘she just said that she would get somebody round’. The interviewee went on to say,

now I did say to her, I’m going out but my partner is here, and he expected somebody to come round …. I do appreciate that the police are very understaffed … my partner was a bit annoyed because this is the second time that they’d actually stamped all over the car.

When questioned further about whether the operator had stated she would send someone round, the interviewee said, ‘Well she said they would look into it … no perhaps that was me thinking well if she say’s they’re going to look into it, they’ll send someone round you know. Perhaps I’d got the wrong end of the stick’.

The interviewee went on to describe how the car had been damaged and she had discovered the damage the following morning when it was light. She had not seen a police officer and nobody had made contact with her. She was asked why she had not reported the damage when it had been found and replied, ‘to be straight with you I didn’t know that I could. I thought well I’ve reported an incident when it happened. That is my fault I didn’t know that I could phone you up and say well actually it’s been damaged’.

Whilst it is understandable that this may not have been a priority call for the police and this incident needs to be taken in the context of all the other demands placed upon the police at that time, it is telling that an incident can be closed on the assumption that if there were any offences, the caller would re-contact the police. Such assumptions are
clearly flawed; once contact is made with the police the caller may believe this is sufficient to initiate further action to be taken. Understandably, callers have no insight into the bureaucratic mechanisms employed by the police to record crimes and incidents.

The final incident, amongst the five, involved a report of vehicle interference from a third party. The incident was classified as ‘suspicious’, given a ‘routine’ grading and the text simply stated ‘Lad trying car door handles, happened a few mins ago, last seen walking up [location], desc as 17Yrs, dressed all in black’. Whilst officers were initially deployed, one was cancelled and the other was redeployed to another incident. The incident was closed as: ‘For information only, suspicious persons’. When interviewed the interviewee stated the response he received from the police was: ‘perhaps he's just waiting for his mates’ (see Interview 4, Appendix D). Asked what his expectations were when he phoned the police the respondent replied: ‘Well the operator, I expected a bit more sense out of him you know he was saying things like he's probably waiting for his mates you know, I mean what sort of thing is that to say. You think to yourself well I’m wasting my time here’. Whilst the incident log indicates that no police officer was sent, the interviewee stated that a police patrol did attend, spoke to the offender, and then let him go. The interviewee was never contacted thereafter despite having witnessed the offence and witnessed the person being stopped and spoken to by the officer.

Conclusions

In ninety-six per cent of the cases examined, the event as reported by the caller, closely matched the detail of the event contained within the descriptive section of the incident log, that is, the information recorded by the control room operator as a result of the initial call. However, sixty per cent of the cases were classified in a non-specific manner and did not adequately reflect the event being reported. Consequently twenty-one of the thirty incidents in this group involved ‘offences against the person’, with sixteen of these involving offences that fell into categories of public disorder, harassment or a combination of both. This initial use of vague, non-specific classifications points to a trivialisation of
events carried out, amongst other reasons, to enable various options to be taken, including doing nothing, whilst avoiding subsequent management scrutiny. As a consequence, the initial classification allotted to incidents by control room operators is invariably an unreliable source of data, often failing to reflect the totality of the incident being reported and suggesting therefore that ‘possible’ allegations of crime are frequently in fact crimes.

Just over half (56%) of the cases reported involved reports directly from the victim with the rest being reported by third parties or on behalf of the victims, half of the latter involved reports by adults on behalf of juvenile victims. Most of the events reported by a third party involved ‘offences against property’. Notably thirteen of the adult victims were elderly and invariably vulnerable and fifty per cent of these were subjected to harassment and public order type offences, often but not always, involving youths. The latter being viewed as difficult to formally deal with and the former being easily manipulated and persuaded that nothing could be done about the event they had reported. Only six of the interviewees indicated that they had simply wanted or expected the incident to be logged by the operator and had no further expectations.

Although it is clear from a number of the incidents that a lack of available resources had a significant impact on the responses given and actions taken by operators, it is difficult to defend the manner in which some of the interviewees were dealt with. There appears to be clear evidence that supports the theory that operators made judgements about what were ‘proper policing’ activities (Burrows and Tarling 1987). There is also no doubt that in order to manage demand, operators used a variety of techniques such as trivialising the incident, placing the onus on the reporting person to provide evidence of an offence or simply using bland non committal statements such as ‘we will log it’ to give an impression of intended activity when no such intention was present.
Whilst this is only a small sample, it is evident that the more vociferous the caller is, the more likely they are to receive a response. Some callers are more easily dissuaded from seeing a police officer, particularly the elderly or more vulnerable, whilst others are less easily put off. The interaction between the caller and the police operator is dependent on a number of factors, not least the type of person involved and social class. The elderly, vulnerable, those from ethnic backgrounds and those that live in less affluent areas appear to be the most disadvantaged in accessing a policing service. The very nature of the relationship between caller and operator means the operator is always likely to have the upper hand, after all the caller is requesting a service which is within the gift of the operator to provide. ‘Calling the police is a confession of social incompetence. The caller is, therefore placed in the position of a supplicant (Waddington 1993, p. 152).’
Chapter 9  
Data analysis: After the call

Officers attended forty of the fifty incidents examined. By triangulating the data contained within the incident logs and the caller interviews, it is possible to gain an insight into how each incident was dealt with by the officers. This included the callers’ views regarding each incident and their interaction with the officer and the reported final outcome as shown within the text of the incident log.

One of the difficulties encountered during the research was ascertaining what information officers had conveyed to the control room operators, either during or after they had attended incidents. It is apparent that the incident logs often reflect an interpretation of the messages passed from the attending officer to the operator, rather than a verbatim account. Some incident logs contained comments within the main body of the log and as such these were easier to attribute to the officer, as they reflected comments from officers at the time they were dealing with the incident, albeit such comments may at times have been truncated and not recorded verbatim.

However, all of the incident logs had a final closing result field and a free text field. The free text field, although it often contained more detail than the closing field, and for the purposes of the research was considered to be generally attributable to comments made by the attendant officer, was not always completed. Whereas the closing result field, which was mandatory, was considered to be an interpretation by the operator of the officers’ comments when resulting the incident. The latter contained the facility to enter only two or three key words and therefore operators were required to summarise the comments and results provided by the officer.
With these limitations in mind, an examination of the incident logs enabled a synopsis to be built up of the manner in which the operators closed the incidents and the type of incidents that had been reported; this is shown in Table B2.

**Response by the attendant officer: Caller or victim not seen**

Although officers attended the forty incidents, they did not see the caller in every case. Where they didn’t, no apparent subsequent attempt was made to contact the caller either by the officer or by the control room operators. This occurred in eight cases involving incidents relating to criminal damage \( (n = 4) \) attempted criminal damage, public order and vehicle interference \( (n = 2) \). In some of these cases it is clear that the caller did not wish to, or did not expect to be seen at the time they made the call.

However, as is demonstrated in two of the incidents the attending officer(s) actually spoke to the offenders but subsequently allowed them go on their way. The caller had not only witnessed the criminal activity but had also witnessed the officers speaking to the offenders. Had the officer(s) either called on the person who had reported the crime or had the control room operator in each case acted as an intermediary, the officer(s) would have been in a far stronger position to take positive action, probably leading to the arrest of the offender.

One such case involved a telephone kiosk being damaged by a group of youths, the person reporting the incident described it to the operator who recorded: ‘there is about 8 kids in the tk [telephone kiosk] over the road smashing it up’. The caller went on to describe how this was always happening. An officer was dispatched to the scene and the incident was subsequently closed with the following comments: ‘Youths sheltering from the weather. No damage’.

When interviewed and asked what she had seen, the caller replied that it was a regular occurrence for youths to hang around the phone box making abusive calls and damaging
the phone box. On this occasion she had witnessed the youths kicking, pushing and pulling at the door so that it had become twisted (see Interview 5, Appendix D). She had thought that the police would catch them in the act and take them round to see their parents but only one officer turned up on his own, spoke to the offenders and then drove off, leaving the offenders to continue causing damage. The interviewee stated that she did not expect the police officer to visit her at that point in time, but had expected a telephone call. She would have been prepared to provide a statement for court purposes but only if it was done anonymously.

It would be easy to criticise the lack of action by the attendant officer but without speaking to the officer it is impossible to know what other factors caused him to take this course. Perhaps, it may have seemed prudent to the officer, considering the number of offenders and a likelihood of limited resources, to walk away. It may have been that there were a significant number of other incidents ongoing at that time and he needed to prioritise what he was dealing with or, it may have been that he genuinely did not see any damage and that the excuses given by the youths were plausible.

Further explanations may rest in the fact that the officer was overloaded with other work and was simply managing his caseload by not taking on any more or it may simply have been that he saw this as only a trivial matter and therefore not a matter that the police should be involved in (see Burrows and Tarling 1987; Burrows et al 2000; MacCabe and Suttcliffe 1978). Whatever the factors involved, it is clear that the lack of action, witnessed by the caller, dented her confidence in the police and this was conveyed during the interview; ‘I thought oh God that was worth it’.

Another such incident involved an event already previously mentioned (see Interview 4, Appendix D) in respect of the perceived negative response from the police operator when the caller made contact with the police. The incident was opened by the operator as: ‘Lad trying car door handles, happened a few mins ago, last seen walking up [location],
desc as 17Yrs, dressed all in black’. Whereas the incident showed that an officer did not attend, the caller stated that he witnessed officers attend although they didn’t come to see him they did speak to the offender but let him go on his way. Whilst the interviewee was more concerned about the initial response he had received from the police operator regarding his call, he did go on to say he would not have had a problem with the attendant officers calling on him. Clearly had the officers done so, he could have provided valuable information regarding what he had just witnessed and the officer would have had good grounds to have made an arrest.

Two further incidents involved callers who had witnessed events as they were passing the scene. In both cases, the callers when interviewed during the research, stated that they had seen police vehicles displaying blue lights being driven towards the locations and had presumed that the police were responding to their call; however, they had not remained at the location and awaited the arrival of the police. One incident was classified during the research as attempted criminal damage and the other as a criminal damage. In both cases the interviewees stated that they had not expected contact from the police unless someone had been caught, in which case they would have been happy to provide statements regarding what they had seen.

In the first of these two cases, the caller had described a male as ‘white of stocky build, in black short sleeved t-shirt, throwing bricks at a building’ and that there was a significant amount of debris on the road and surrounding area from the bricks that had already been thrown. He described a number of alarms that appear to have been activated in commercial premises. It was surprising therefore that the officer concluded the incident as ‘area search, negative result’. Although the search for the offender may not have been fruitful, it is difficult to envisage how, given the description of the general scene by the caller, there was no mention of any debris or alarm activations in the area from the officer.
The second of these incidents involved a group of youths smashing windows in unoccupied commercial premises within a leisure centre. The caller described how there was a lot of smashed glass and when he rode past the location the following night he noted the windows had been boarded up. It is clear from the incident that the attendant officer acknowledges that there was damage and that he had conducted an area search for the offenders. However, the log shows the result from the officer as stating that he was uncertain whether the damage was new or old and that a person from other premises, responsible for the building, was not interested in making any formal complaint. In this instance it was apparent from the caller that a crime had been committed but the officer had failed to acknowledge this fact, instead preferring to suggest that this may have been old damage.

Whilst a person, who would supposedly have been acting on behalf of the company that were responsible for the premises, was purportedly not interested in making a formal complaint, it is not clear whether the officer would have reported the same outcome had any of the offenders been caught. A conclusion then might be that this was viewed as a minor matter that would not result in any productive outcome.

Another call from a third party that had witnessed youths causing damage, reported a group of youths ‘ripping the top of peoples [sic] gateposts off and causing damage to most peoples fences/gates as they walk along’. This incident, attended by an officer who arrived within ten minutes of the call was closed as ‘No trace of youths on arrival, area searched negative result’. The caller, who lived in one of the houses in the road and had witnessed the event, was not seen and did not receive any further communication from the police. When interviewed during the research, the interviewee described how this had happened the previous night as well and that on this occasion she had witnessed the youths ‘just going along sort of lifting the coping stones off people’s walls, gate piers and things … the sort of things that are cemented down … they were lifting gates off and just sort of pottering along doing that’. Her expectations were that the police probably
wouldn’t attend: ‘because I know how stretched things are’. She went on to explain, ‘but this, I mean the bridleway thing, I could see someone swinging and it snapping and throwing things towards our cars, that wasn’t good’. Once again, as with other incidents, despite a description having been given of a significant amount of damage caused, the attendant officer appears to have ignored this, providing a result that only reflected effort expended in attempting to find the offenders. It is not clear whether any of the damage was reported the following morning. The caller when interviewed was pleased that the police had attended the incident, even though she had not seen them, but was disappointed that she had not been told they had attended.

A further reported incident concerned a disturbance in a foyer of a block of flats between a male and female. According to the caller she went out to intervene but a female ‘went for her’. This incident was matched to another report from a second caller and was closed as ‘domestic dispute’, and the second incident was closed as ‘advice given’. Describing how the female turned on her, pushed her shoulder and then pushed the door into her as she tried to retreat back in to the flat, the fifty-seven year old caller went on to say that the particular people involved were always causing a disturbance. She was aware that her neighbour and someone else had also called the police and that at the time she called the police she had requested to be seen. She later found out that the police had attended and seen a neighbour but not her. Asked what she thought about the service received from the police she replied, ‘yeah they did their job, but at the end of the day I didn’t know the outcome of it till I asked, I told the lad about it and he told me they came, they told him there weren’t a lot they could do about it, that’s what he said to me’. The interviewee went on to state that the reason she wanted to talk to the police was to tell them about being assaulted. She also went on to describe how a couple of weeks previously she had been accosted by the same female and the male had pushed her: ‘that’s another thing see, he come right up to my face, he pushed my shoulder and said, don’t think I’ve effing finished with you either’. She had not reported this previous incident seeing little value in doing so: ‘well he’s an old man, what’s the point’.
Had the police officers that attended the incident seen this caller she would have provided sufficient evidence of an assault and public order offence on the night in question and of an assault previously. There is no recorded explanation as to why the officers did not visit this woman but one reason could simply have been that the details of the caller from this first incident were lost to those managing the incident within the control room; owing to the fact that the incident log was matched with another and then closed. The second incident log was used to allocate resources to the event and officers that attended may not have been made aware of this particular caller, although the second incident log reflects that a call had been made from this lady and that a ‘female went for her’.

A further incident involved a report from a member of the public who witnessed youths damaging the play area in a park at the rear of his house. He went on to describe how the youths had damaged a roundabout by prising the bars apart and he had watched this through binoculars. The roundabout had since been taken away for repair and he also described how youths causing damage within the park was a constant problem. He went on to describe how an officer attended and the youths had run off and how he saw the officer from a distance and pointed him in the direction that the youths had gone. He then saw the officer leave and had not been spoken to at all. Considering the description of the damage given by the caller and the fact that the officer had not spoken to him, it was surprising to find that the incident log was commented: ‘Inf [Informant] seen – some youths have been in the area. Ran off on sight of officers. No sign of new damage’. The final result shown in the log was ‘advice given – nuisance youths’.

Perhaps the control room operator had misinterpreted what the officer had said or had made assumptions that the informant had been seen or perhaps the officer was somewhat economical with the truth in respect of seeing the informant. What does seem quite apparent though is that from the interviewee’s account there was clearly damage caused and he would have been able to describe this to the attendant officer. A more
plausible explanation is to be found in the fact that the officer and control room operator viewed this as a trivial matter and one that was not worthy of police attention. The incident log provides some indication that demand was high at the time of the call, where an entry at an early stage in the log states ‘all units committed’.

The last incident of note involved a call from a member of the public who had witnessed two young teenagers trying to remove wheel trims from a vehicle. They were seen to walk off and the caller provided a description of the males. As well as describing them, he also stated that he had spoken to them and told them to leave. When interviewed, during the research, the caller described the event and stated it was his neighbours’ car and they were out at the time; he had phoned the police immediately after speaking to the offenders. He had watched them for several minutes loitering around before they unpacked their tools and attempted to steal the wheel trims.

Asked whether he had seen the police he replied, ‘Well I didn’t see anyone, I went back out a couple of times and never heard anything again, until I got your letter’. Asked whether anyone had been to see him he said ‘No I don’t expect them to either’ explaining that it was ‘my kind of perception how important that probably was’. When asked why he had this perception he explained, ‘because I’ve rung before on things like this and never hear anything and I feel as if it’s maybe not, not a priority you know’. The interviewee went on to explain that he and his wife had been in all evening and nobody had contacted him or visited his address. He was adamant that nobody had knocked on his door or rung his doorbell and that in fact it was highly unlikely that a police car would have driven into the close without anybody noticing and yet, the incident log shows an officer arriving eight minutes after the call and leaving the scene seven minutes after that. The incident log is closed with the comments, ‘Checked area no trace of persons – no reply from inf address. No damage to any vehs apparent’.
Once again it is difficult to reconcile the view of the incident as given by the interviewee and that of the comments on the incident log. The interviewee had described the vehicle as a white Mercedes and it was parked opposite his house. An hour later he had gone to the house across the road and spoken to the owners of the vehicle to inform them what had happened; they too had not seen the police. The only plausible explanation was that the officer did not attend or if he had, then he had simply driven past without stopping.

**Response by the attendant officer: Caller seen and declined to pursue**

Callers had seen and spoken to an officer in thirty-two of the fifty cases examined. In six of the thirty-two cases, the victim stated that they did not wish the police to take any further action. These case are divided into two distinct groups; those where the victim made the decision of their own free will and those where it appeared the officer had successfully dissuaded them from pursuing the matter.

The first of these incidents has already been discussed previously and relates to a report of assault and attempted robbery where a young girl had been subject of bullying (See Interview 1, Appendix D). The incident log was commenced as ‘callers daughter was walking home this evening and was approached by a group of five youths. They grabbed her by the neck and hit her’. When the mother, the caller, was interviewed, she described the conversation she had with the officer and what her daughter had told the police officer whilst in her presence. The officer had offered to see the offender and interview her, getting her to sign his pocket book to confirm what had happened.

The interviewee felt this was a bit heavy handed and was fearful of retaliation towards her daughter: ‘I said … I’m not going to take it any further unless anything else happens … I don’t really want to go to court unless I have to’. She went on to describe how, worried about retributions from the offender’s parents, she decided that she would deal with the matter through the school; which it transpired she later did. The interviewee confirmed that she made the decision to not take the matter any further in conjunction with her
daughter and that she had the impression that the officer was keen to take further action. The incident log was concluded by the officer in a manner that reflected the victim and caller's wishes.

Whilst the incident was not recorded as a crime, it is apparent from the conversation with the caller that the officer was keen to visit the offender to 'get them to sign his notebook or something saying what they'd done'. The inference of this is that the officer was keen to pursue the matter in a manner that would have resulted in a detected crime but avoided any further work. Such detections were allowed at the time under the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime (Home Office 1998c) and involved an indication from the victim that they did not wish to pursue the matter through the court and that guilt of the offender was clear. Obtaining a signed admission from the offender in a pocket notebook would fulfil this clarity of guilt requirement.

Another incident where the victim declined to take the matter further and did so of his own free will involved damage to a car. The victim stated that the offender had damaged his car because he would not give him a lift. It transpired that the offender was the brother of the victim's girlfriend and that he had seen the victim in town, asked for a lift and on refusal had kicked the car causing a dent. When interviewed the victim stated he had been seen by police officers and they had stated that they had been out looking for the offender but had been unable to find him. He went on to say that they told him that 'if they arrested him tonight, I’d have to go through court and everything and I just, I didn’t realise that and I didn’t do anything in the end'.

Asked whether what the officers had said had put him off he replied, 'didn't really put me off I just, the blokes really not worth going to court over and just can’t be bothered with him, it’s just hassle in the future from it'. He went on to explain that he based his decision on the fact that it was his girlfriend’s brother and he ‘didn’t want to start any trouble with the rest of the family’. He confirmed that he would have been prepared to go to court had
the offence been committed by a stranger and in hindsight, on this occasion, if he had an
inkling that the police would insist on taking action he probably would not have phoned
them in the first place. On this occasion it appears that the victim made the decision not
to pursue the matter based on the information given by the officers. Whilst the officers
may, in the manner in which they explained the course of action open to the victim, have
appeared to attempt to put the victim off pursuing the matter through to court, the main
contributing factor behind the decision was the victim’s relationship with the offender and
the problems he envisaged would be caused at a later stage.

A third incident where the victim appears to have made a decision not to pursue the
matter involved an assault on a woman by an ex-partner. The incident, which had been
initially classified by the control room operator as a ‘domestic dispute’, serves to highlight
some of the difficulties faced by officers attending these types of event. The incident log
initially indicates that the incident involved an assault and contains comments that the
victim was very distressed. It describes how the offender had pushed his way into the
house and tried to drag the victim out of the house but had not hit her and she didn’t have
any bruises. The incident was concluded by the attendant officer as ‘advice given, no
offences, report to DVU [Domestic Violence Unit].’

When interviewed the victim described how she had just broken up with her boyfriend
and during a heated telephone conversation had asked for her keys back. He had
requested that she return some items belonging to him and he had arrived at the
address, handed her keys back, retrieved an item of furniture and then had wanted some
other property. She had asked him to wait outside but when she went to shut the door he
forced his way in throwing her up against the doorframe. He then tried to drag her
outside (see Interview 6, Appendix D). The interviewee went on to say that when the
police officers arrived she had told them what had occurred and they had said, ‘well
because there’s no physical injury we can’t actually charge him for assault because like
there’s no bruising or anything like that, its just a case of erm stay clear of him … and
possibly get the locks changed just in case’. Asked what she expected the officers to do, she replied that she wasn’t sure because she felt intimidated by the boyfriend and his family. Asked what she told the officers she replied, ‘oh I said that it probably won’t be beneficial for me to press charges’. The victim went on to confirm that it was more her decision not to pursue the matter because it would aggravate the situation and that she had previously, as a result of an incident at work, been called to attend court as a witness ‘and I found that nerve wracking enough, never mind being a victim’. She went on to explain that she wanted the matter recorded in case anything happened in the future but she didn’t want to have the offender charged because ‘it would hurt him for the future, for jobs and what not’.

What is clear from the conversation is that the officers had no wish to pursue the matter but the ultimate decision, the victim felt, was hers. One of the difficulties faced by the officers, had the victim wished to pursue any case, was a lack of evidence of anything other than the victim’s word that she had been assaulted. If the offender, when interviewed, had denied the offence, the case would have resulted in one person’s word against another’s. It was unlikely at that time that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) would take the matter any further. The CPS would only bring a case to trial if it considered there was ‘a realistic prospect of conviction’ (Rose 1996, p. 133).

Aside from this issue, at the time the offence was committed, the officers may well have considered that they did not have a power of arrest for the offence of common assault. Whereas an offence of assault occasioning actual bodily harm (ABH) gave the officers an automatic power in law to arrest a suspect, the offence of common assault did not. The difference lay simply in the fact that the victim had no visible injuries. Whilst the officers could have considered other options it would have been far easier to do nothing other than to offer advice. To facilitate this, the officers concluded the incident to show that no offences had occurred, when clearly they had.
Two further incidents fell into the category where the victim had apparently made up their own mind not to pursue the matter. The first of these involved an assault on a young man who ‘couldn’t really be bothered with the hassle of going to court and everything’. This victim had been in a taxi with friend and they had all attempted to run off without paying. He was caught by the taxi driver, taken into the town centre and assaulted by numerous men, resulting in bruising and a cut lip. He reported the matter at the police station and because he was drunk, officers took him home and visited him the following day. He stated that the police officer that saw him told him he had committed a crime as well but he could make a statement about the assault if he wished. He declined this and the incident log simply reflects the fact that he did not wish to make a complaint.

The second incident involved an assault and criminal damage. The victim, an owner of a factory, had been subjected to youths throwing eggs at his premises over a five week period. On this occasion he caught one of the group that had just carried out the same act and took him into the factory to phone the police. He then described how youths and their parents, who had emerged from a nearby public house, mobbed him. One of the youths punched him in the face and pulled the windscreen wipers off his van.

When the police officer arrived he went with the victim to the public house and spoke to the youths and their parents. He acted as an intermediary and whilst the victim had initially wanted to ‘press charges’ he changed his mind on the proviso that the damage was paid for and the egg throwing ceased. Although critical that the officer had asked him initially what he wanted to do, the victim went on to say: ‘but he did handle it very well, talked to the parents, talked to the kids, sorted it out and they’ve all had a [sic], caught all the children, the ones that threw the eggs, we’ve got them as well, he talked to them as well and he handled it well to be honest’.
The reason given by the victim for not pursuing the matter was ‘you know he’s only a young kid like, you know, it’s daft for him having a record for the rest of his life’. The incident log reflects comments from the officer to the effect that advice was given and there were no offences. Although the incident appears to have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, once again, clearly offences had been committed.

Whilst it was apparent that the previous five incidents discussed were not recorded as crimes because the victims did not want to pursue the matter, there was one incident where they clearly would have done, but were put off by the attendant officer from doing so. The incident, a continuation of previous incidents where the police had been called and had at times conveyed the victim home for his own safety, involved an assault on a thirteen year old by a group of youths.

On this particular occasion the victim had been out with his friends when he was accosted by these youths and punched in the mouth, resulting in a split lip. He and his friend, who incidentally had also been assaulted, had run off and hidden until the coast was clear and then went home whereupon he arrived some forty minutes late with blood on his ripped T-shirt. His mother had phoned the police and reported the matter and an officer had attended that evening. The mother described how the attendant officers made a great deal about the length of time it would take to take a crime report and that the victim would then have to attend court at a later date (see Interview 7, Appendix D), the end result was that the son declined to take the matter further. The interviewee indicated that it was her son’s decision to take this course of action but then went on to say: ‘I don’t particularly want to sit through the courts and everything’.

Asked if she would have been happy if the officers had been more positive and had stated they would arrest the offenders she said, ‘well, I would have been happy about that ... because they said that if they, if they went out now and found them they weren’t able, they couldn’t arrest them, all they could do was ask them to come to the police station’.
She went on to say that the officers should have taken a description of the offenders and their names, which her son knew, but they didn’t: ‘all they took was my name and his and that’s it’. She felt the officers should have done more but ‘weren’t particularly interested at all in who had done it or what they were or who they were’. She felt the officers had dissuaded her son from pursuing the matter in the manner they described the court process.

Despite the officer having stated that they would pass the matter on to the beat officer to deal with, nobody had returned to see the victim or his mother. The interviewee went on to describe that this was affecting her son’s schooling and that he couldn’t go out freely during the day. The incident log records the result given by the officer as ‘details will be obtained and passed to the beat manager – dispute between youths – advice given’.

Notably there is no mention within the incident log result that the victim had been assaulted. The assault as described falls within the definition of an ABH, which at that time was an arrestable offence, and yet according to the interviewee the officer stated that an arrest couldn’t be made. Clearly this was an enquiry that may have resulted in identification issues and would not be straightforward to progress. It was clear that not only had the victim been assaulted but his friend had as well, giving the officer corroborating evidence of the events that had unfolded. Why the officer stated that they could not arrest the offender is a matter of conjecture. One reason may have been recognition that this would not be an easy case to handle and therefore the easiest thing to do would be nothing at all other than to pass the information on see Burrows and Tarling 1987). Quite plausibly the officer may have believed they did not have a power of arrest and therefore the investigation of the incident would be made even more difficult by the need to try to invite offenders into the police station to be interviewed or to see them at home.
To elucidate further, this mistaken belief may have stemmed from the fact that at the time of the events described, there was considerable confusion amongst officers about the offences of ABH and common assault (see Chapter 5).

In all six of the cases described above the victim or the appropriate adult acting on their behalf did not wish to pursue the matter. The reasons are varied and involve a number of factors such as the relationships between the offender and the victim, the outcome of the situation and the victims’ views about the court process. The latter is clearly a matter, which officers use to dissuade the victims from continuing with the complaint. What officers also demonstrate is the apparent lack of knowledge of the law, mixed with an unwillingness to embark on an investigation that goes beyond the realms as to what they might view as straightforward. In these cases there appears to be willingness demonstrated by officers to take the easier option to ease their workload and, in order to avoid scrutiny, they all too often, either by omission or otherwise, misrepresent the facts when providing the control room operators with a result.

**Response by the attendant officer: Caller seen (no offences)**

Further analysis revealed that of the thirty-two incidents where an officer had seen the caller, a further fourteen of them had been concluded by the officer to show that no offences had been committed but the interviewee had not stated whether they wished to pursue the matter or not. The results of these are shown in a combination of different ways, such as: no offences, no offences: no complaint, no offences: advice given and no offences: area search.

The incidents cover a range of events involving offences of assault, attempted robbery, criminal damage, burglary, vehicle interference, public order and harassment and can be divided into two groups, those where the attendant officer provided the interviewee (caller) with a reason why they could not pursue the matter and those where they appeared to give no reason at all.
In eight of the cases the officers provided the interviewee with an explanation as to why they could not pursue the matter. The first of these involved an assault on an adult male and the report of the incident was made to the police by his partner. The case is of particular interest owing to the fact that during the research, both parties were interviewed on the phone and both appeared to be inarticulate, in so far as they were unable to express themselves in a concise manner. Nonetheless, both had a tale to tell and with careful questioning and a little patience it was possible to obtain a significant amount of detail. This case has already been discussed previously in respect of the initial incident log not totally reflecting the event.

The initial report, as recorded by the control room operator, showed the caller, the victim’s wife, reporting that her husband had answered the door and ‘kids stuck a BB gun in his face’. The initial response from the police was to verify that this was a BB gun and to obtain a description of the offender, a twelve year old youth, who had been named by the caller. When interviewed, the wife explained how there had been a knock at the door and when her husband had answered it a youth had fired a pellet at his face. The husband told her what had happened and she telephoned the police via the ‘999’ telephone system. She was initially concerned that she would get into trouble for dialling 999 because the youth had gone. When the police arrived she stated two officers turned up and she told them what had happened and then went on to say that they told her that they finished ‘at ten o’clock but we’ll go and monitor the area, see if we can find him’. Asked what the police officers told her they could do about the incident she replied:

They, till they get more evidence they couldn’t do a lot, that’s all they said, because they didn’t actually, when they went to speak to the boy, they couldn’t find the gun, you know they always get rid of the gun. I don’t know what they are going to do really truthfully.
Asked what she thought about this she said, 'I wish they could do something, can't they caution him or make his parents keep him in or this you know’. She went on to say that the officers had looked for the pellet that had been fired but couldn’t find it.

When the husband was interviewed he reiterated that he had been shot on the forehead with what he believed to be a pellet from a BB gun. He had chased the youth down the garden path and had been fired at again. He said that it stung when he was hit and went on to say 'I wanted to hit him but under the law I can’t’. He explained how he told the attendant police officers what had happened, gave a description of the offender, who at the time was wearing a type of sheet to cover his face, but he had recognised his voice. Asked what the police told him he replied: ‘Because it’s … what you call outside the curtilage, he has to, I don’t know if they can prosecute him because his mask and it was over the border of the, if it’s on my border they can prosecute him but they can’t, he just warned him out.

He went on to say that the officers advised him to get a video camera to try to capture the offender on camera and the officers had simply stated they would look into the matter. The incident was closed with the log commented: ‘Person with pellet gun seen and spoken to, no pellet fired, no damage or injury caused, just further problems with local youths. OIC [officer in the case] going to discuss with caller and crime reduction unit’. It was quite apparent from the interview that something had been fired at the victim and that it had hit his face. There is no doubt that this was an assault albeit perhaps a common assault as no injuries were apparent. The officers appear to have told the victim and his wife that the gun had not been found but the result of the incident suggests that a ‘person with a pellet gun had been seen and spoken to’. Not only that, but the victim and his wife are clear that the weapon had been fired and yet the result states it had not.

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Whilst it may be that the officers had confused themselves with the law in relation to firearms offences, the description of the events by the victim could have left them in no doubt that the victim had been assaulted as a result of a weapon being fired. If the log correctly reflects the result that the officers gave to the control room operator, there can be little doubt that the officers were untruthful about the events that they had dealt with.

Once again this appears to have been an incident that may been described as a little more complicated than the ‘run of the mill’ type of incident generally dealt with by officers. This, coupled with the fact that a juvenile was involved, there may have identification issues and that there would not have been a power of arrest for common assault, may provide some insight into why the officers clearly opted to do nothing. Whilst it is possibly conjecture, another factor that seems readily apparent is the type of victim involved, who it appears, may have been easily dissuaded from making a complaint and equally as easily persuaded that nothing could be done.

Three further incidents involved public order and harassment type offences. The first of these involved an elderly couple who were both ill, the caller having just been released from hospital following a hip replacement and her husband, who had cancer. The wife had reported that youths had spread dog faeces on her window and she had named one of the offenders. This involved an ongoing problem with youths in the area and was just one of a number of incidents where the youths had banged on her wall and door and thrown objects at her windows.

When interviewed she explained how neighbours had intervened previously and on this occasion had obtained the names of the youths involved after ‘a lady said, they were pulling their trousers down and showing their backsides and doing all sorts of things out there to them you know’. The interviewee went on to explain all of the residents were elderly and added:
As I say I love it here you know and it's a shame it can be spoilt like that … it is upsetting, it's on my mind and I feel jittery when I draw the curtains now, you know. Afraid like something's going to come at the windows and that … you're on edge all the time hearing noises and that you know.

When asked what the attendant officer had told her could do she replied, ‘he just said, well I'll go round and see them, he said I'll go there now, but I mean that's as far as it went you see’. Asked whether the officer had said he would return to see her she stated, ‘I did, I said will you come and he said no, because I'd like to have had feedback really you know, to see what the situation was’. The interviewee went on to explain that she didn’t think the police could do very much else other than visit the offender. Officers, that had attended previous incidents, had told her that there wasn’t anything that could be done because the offender was under age. She estimated the age of the offender to be ten or eleven years of age and if this was correct then the offender would not have been under the age of criminal responsibility. The incident log shows that the incident was concluded with the comments ‘No offences parties to be advised’ and was closed by the operator as ‘nuisance youths’. It is unclear, whether the officer visited the offender but he certainly did not return to see the victim.

The second incident is one already discussed previously and also involves ongoing problems with youths (see Interview 2, Appendix D). On this occasion the caller stated he was unable to park his car on his return home because there were seventeen year old youths waiting for him. They had threatened him and kicked at his wing mirror when he had left the location half an hour previously. He said that he spoke to the officers that arrived to see him and explained that he was frightened for his safety. During the interview he went on to explain that he was frightened of getting assaulted and had already had one car stolen and the youths had threatened to steal his present car: ‘these are violent people, they’re nasty people … the thing is they don’t live here, they all congregate here, cause hassle and then go home. It’s destroying my life at the moment,
it is, it's really wrecking my life’. When he spoke to the officer he was told there wasn’t a lot they could do, they hadn’t committed any crimes.

The incident is simply closed by the control room operator as ‘No offences disclosed: nuisance youths’. There is no apparent explanation of the result of the incident from the attendant officer. Both of the previous cases discussed involved at least some form of harassment and public order offences. In the latter case there was clearly an attempt to cause damage but in both cases the officers have stated that nothing could be done and the incidents have been closed to the effect that no offences have been committed, in the latter case the officer actually told the victim this was so.

The third incident was originally reported by a sixty-five year old victim as a criminal damage and threats from a neighbour. When interviewed, the victim, who had recently been in hospital recovering from a heart attack, described a history of events where he and his wife had been threatened, spat at and had dirt thrown all over his car as well as having it covered in broken eggs. The offender, a relative of one of his neighbours, had ‘kicked up a stink and that and oh he was gonna [sic] kill me and all this … called me a bastard, called the wife a tosser’. This occurred on the Friday and was apparently as a result of a parking dispute. The victim went on to describe how on the Sunday he found his car: ‘Oh there was spit all over it, there’s still some on the floor now and egg shells, you know yolk and dirt, loads of dirt and everything you know’. The victim stated that he had cleaned the car and there didn’t appear to be any damage. He said that when the police officer came round to see him he looked at the car and said ‘he couldn’t do nothing because there weren’t any damage to the car … I never witnessed him do it, I know he done it, I mean it’s just proving it you see. I mean I never had trouble like this to me car and that’.

Asked what the officer said could be done about the events on the Friday, the victim continued, ‘he said I should have reported it on the Friday when this happened’. He
stated the officer had said he would go around and see the other person, had done so and then returned to see the victim and his wife. The victim went on to say that his wife would remember more of the details and she too was then interviewed. She told much the same story but added that on the Friday, the offender threatened her husband: ‘… he was telling him to get outside he was gonna knock his teeth down his throat, he told him to curl up in bed and have another heart attack and die’. She described how when sorting out the car she felt sick, ‘and what was on the side of the car, I just kept coming in and reaching it was so bad’. She went on to describe what the police officer had said when spoken to by the couple: ‘he said there was no damage to the car, but there was nothing really that he could do, because we wanted to prosecute and he just didn’t, the policeman didn’t seem to accept this; I suppose he wanted to keep the peace’.

The incident was concluded by the officer as ‘No damage has been caused both parties have been seen and advised’. These two events were undoubtedly extremely upsetting for the couple involved. Whilst there does not appear to have been any damage caused, the events themselves would have been sufficient to suspect that a course of conduct amounting to harassment had been committed. The conduct on the first occasion would also be likely to amount to a public order offence. It would appear that the officer did not view the events as serious and therefore did not feel a need to pursue the matter beyond speaking to the offender. When interviewed the victim and his wife also described an incident involving the same offender that had occurred on the morning of the interview whereupon he again had spat, this time over their fence and had called them both c***s. This was one of the few incidents to be referred back to the officer’s manager to be properly resolved.

Two further incidents involved what would appear to be attempted burglaries, although in both cases there was no definite evidence to be adduced, other than the evidence given by the victim and the circumstances that they described. The first involved an elderly lady who had heard banging at her back door in the middle of the night. She had turned
all the lights on and gone downstairs and banged on the door and the noise stopped. A few minutes later two neighbours from across the road knocked on her door and asked if she was alright as they had seen the lights on and had purportedly seen three men running from her back garden carrying something. She phoned the police and when they arrived they also spoke to the neighbours who had waited around outside to speak to the officers.

During interview, the lady explained that the two neighbours were friends with her immediate neighbour who she had trouble with, as they were very noisy and a nuisance. When probed about this, the problems with the neighbours amounted to loud playing of music, shouting and swearing to the extent that other neighbours had also complained. There was no damage to the property and no signs of anything being disturbed in the back garden, the only evidence that was apparent that someone had been in her back garden was that her bin had been moved slightly and the information that had been provided by the neighbours. The interviewee went on to say that she thought the neighbours’ behaviour suspicious and alluded to the fact that she thought that they may have been responsible, but based this assumption on the fact that there was no other evidence. Asked what the police officer had said he would do about the matter she replied, ‘Well he said he couldn’t make an, he wouldn’t actually make a report on it because there’s not really anything evident that had gone on’. The officer concluded the incident as ‘area search: no offences’.

The second incident involved a report of a person trying to break into a house. The occupant was at home at the time and her husband had just taken the dog out for a walk when ‘I went into the bedroom and, don’t put the light on and as I walked in, someone was trying the window … so I came back out here and as I did they were yanking at the back door but I’d locked that anyway, but I see the handle going down they were pulling at it’. The lady described how she could see a shadow outside and she then dialled ‘999’. Her husband later returned and checked around the house but didn’t find anything amiss,
following that a police officer arrived. She related what had occurred to the police officer and he had a look around but couldn’t see anything, there was no damage caused and ‘he said he’d keep an eye and he’d come round the next couple of evenings to make sure nothing was, nothing else was going on’. The interviewee explained that a number of the bungalows in the area had been broken into whilst the occupants were in and that one bungalow had been entered through the bedroom window and the offender had left via the front door. The attendant officer concluded this incident as ‘no trace of forced entry: passing attention to be made’.

Whereas it is understandable that the officer did not believe any offence had been committed in the first of these two incidents described above, the second incident would clearly have seemed to be an attempted burglary. Both incidents occurred during dark evenings. The first incident appears to be no more than prowlers and although disturbing for the occupant, in terms of recording a notifiable offence, there does not appear to be sufficient information available to do so, primarily because the occupant could not say where the noise that she heard was coming from and she did not witness anything. The only thing that was witnessed was by neighbours who saw three youths running away. However, the second incident is somewhat clearer. The interviewee saw a shadow and someone attempting to pull the window open, more to the point she saw someone trying the door handle at the back door.

If the officer was in any doubt, then the fact that similar premises had recently been broken into in the locality in a similar manner, should have led him to believe this was an attempted burglary. In both cases it is apparent that the officers’ were reliant more on the absence of any tangible evidence than they were on the information provided by the victims or witnesses and as a result, took no further action. In the latter case, there may have been scope for a forensic crime scene investigation and this may have assisted in identifying not only the offender from this particular incident but from the other burglaries as well.
One incident where the caller stated that two youths had tried to ‘mug’ her parents on the way home was initially recorded as an attempted robbery. The incident in fact involved two youths who appeared to be drunk and had approached her parents after having walked past them and then waited for them on a street corner. As the parents, a couple in their sixties, went past the youths, the youths fell in behind them and began to approach them. The caller’s father stopped and asked them what they wanted and they then became abusive. Other members of the public intervened and the youths then became threatening. The caller described how her parents had arrived home in a ‘state’ and she therefore thought that someone had tried to mug them. Having interviewed both the caller and her mother, it became apparent that this was not an attempted robbery but a minor public order offence. Nevertheless, it did have an affect on the couple and the mother described how she hadn’t been out on her own since: ‘I’m still shaking; … you’re sort of looking over your shoulder all the time’. The officer concluded the incident with the comments: ‘No offences disclosed. Couple were scared by the actions of a couple of drunks who were behaving in a strange manner’. There is little that can be said about the manner in which the incident was concluded except that it was ‘strange’ in itself and indicated that the officer merely saw this as a trivial matter. Officers are, of course, used to dealing with these types of incidents and this type of behaviour, it may be that the officer judged the incident on this basis and not from the victims’ viewpoint.

The last of the eight incidents examined where the officers provided the interviewee with an explanation as to why they could not pursue the matter, involved the report of criminal damage to motor vehicles. The incident also demonstrates the lengths that members of the public will go to, to assist the police, sometimes with little or no reward at the end for their efforts. The initial call was recorded on the incident log as: ‘4 males walking along loc smashing w/mirrors off veh’s – one male is wearing white fleece top, dark trousers – they are heading away from town centre end – approx 4 veh’s that have been damaged’. The call was received via ‘999’ after the caller and her husband had witnessed these youths kicking the wing mirrors on vehicles as they walked up the road. This was not the
first time this had occurred and on two previous occasions vehicles had been damaged in
the same manner. A neighbour had told the husband that he had witnessed this on a
previous occasion and had described one of the offenders as wearing a white fleece top.
As a result of the spate of damage the husband and wife had waited up on the
corresponding night for a couple of weeks before witnessing the events as described.
Following the initial call, the husband had followed the offenders and eventually watched
them enter a vehicle parked in a precinct. The offenders, watched by the husband, sat in
this vehicle until the police arrived.

During interview the husband confirmed that he had described the events to the police
and had pointed them in the direction of the vehicle. He was clear that the offender
wearing the white fleece had kicked out at the wing mirrors of a number of cars, some of
which had been bent backwards and others had sprung back of their own accord. He
said that although he didn’t see the kicks make contact, it was apparent they had by the
noise that was made. None of the vehicles had any apparent permanent damage. He
went on to say how he had described the history of incidents and what he had witnessed
to the police officers that had attended and ‘they said that in the absence of criminal
damage there wasn’t anything they could do and that … we know who they are now, if it
is them and obviously there’s no evidence that we know, we’ve got their names’. The
interviewee didn’t think there was much else the police could have done. The attendant
officer, a sergeant, concluded the incident as ‘youths seen and details obtained –
appears no offences at this time’.

Given the fact that the interviewee had witnessed at least one of the offenders kicking out
at vehicles and the fact that wing mirrors had been bent backwards would have been
sufficient to make an arrest for attempted criminal damage and to record the incident as
such. One might have thought that this was a golden opportunity not to be missed, not
only had the interviewee seen the events as they unfolded but he was able to identify the
offenders and had not lost sight of them at all. As these were, most probably, the same
offenders that had caused damage previously, it beggars belief that the attendant officers missed the opportunity and there is no explanation why this should be the case.

A further six incidents were examined where the attendant officer had concluded the incident to show that no offences had been committed but had not apparently informed the victim as to why this was the case. The first of these involved an assault on a thirteen year old by a boy of a similar age and then by two significantly older teenagers. The thirteen year old was punched in the face by the youngest and then pinned up against a wall by the older youths. The boy’s mother reported the matter to the police because of the assault by the older youths. When interviewed the mother said that the police officer was very efficient, having arrived fairly promptly. She went on to explain that he had visited the offenders home but since only the younger brother was at home and not the offenders, he had left his details for them to contact him.

She further explained that the officer had said the younger boy had denied his brothers’ involvement and she had told a police officer that there were other witnesses one of whom was an adult, but he didn’t appear interested. Furthermore, ‘he said do you want to take this to court, which I wouldn’t advise you to do, and I thought well, initially that’s not why I called you the police to take him to court’. She explained that this was not the first time that the three boys had been involved in assaults in the area and that her son had got off lightly as he was just shocked and had no injuries other than his throat hurting a little from where he’d been held. Asked to elaborate on what the officer had said to her about going to court she replied:

… well I wouldn’t advise you to put your friend through that … along those lines was what he said. Well I wanted them to have a word with them and find out, you know why, why they did this I mean can’t they do anything, I mean if … to stop them, if it means prosecution then I would do that to stop this happening to somebody else.
In this case the expectation was that the officer would deal with the matter in a positive manner, the interviewee although pleased at the quick response was left wondering whether anything was going to be done. The officer concluded the incident as ‘no offences disclosed, informant seen, community based problem, further enquiries, mark for local beat officer’. There were obvious offences disclosed that witnesses had seen but it is apparent that the officer had no intention of taking the matter further and had managed to resume from the incident on the basis of promises of action to the future, a strategy recognised by Black (1968).

Two further incidents involved events that could be described as vehicle interference occurred in the middle of the night. In the first, a witness watched a teenager trying all the car doors in the street and the second, involved two youths looking at several vehicles and wiping away the dew on the windows to peer into the vehicles and had been seen to try the door handles on one of the vehicles.

In the first incident the police arrived and the interviewee went out to speak to the police officers, he had seen them drive up and down the road a couple of times. He provided them with details of the incident and they drove off. He wasn’t told what they were going to do and they didn’t examine any of the vehicles in the road. The incident was concluded by the officers as ‘No trace of males. Vehs checked in street and appear undamaged. Incident resulted pending further info coming to light’.

In the second incident the officers spoke to the witness and examined a vehicle commenting, ‘they were looking for tools’. The incident was concluded as ‘ASNT’ [area searched no trace]. In both cases it is apparent that the officers did not recognise that an offence had been committed. Perhaps the officers had not realised that in 1998 the Notifiable Offence List and Home Office Counting Rules had been changed to incorporate the offence of vehicle interference. Perhaps they viewed this as a trivial matter or expected that they would be criticised if they recorded such an offence, bearing in mind
that the Home Office had set targets around vehicle crime. In the first case though, there is an anomaly in the fact that the witness states the officers didn’t check the vehicles and yet they concluded the incident as having checked the vehicles, the reader can probably draw their own conclusions.

A further incident involved what appeared to be a burglary or attempted burglary of a shed in a back garden of a house. The interviewee described a series of events, which led him to believe that, whilst he and his wife were in the house during a late evening, someone had opened his shed door but had not stolen anything. Initially they heard their dog and the next-door neighbour’s dog bark and growl, they then heard a loud bang, as if something had been knocked over, and then the security light came on at the front of the house. The interviewee described how a patio table, a load of toys and some wood stacked up at the side of the house against the fence appeared to have been knocked over and the shed door was wide open. The shed contained lawnmowers, tools and children’s toys.

He went on to say that it had been fairly windy on the night in question but the dog was inside and wasn’t normally disturbed by the wind and the light sensor at the front of the house hadn’t been set off before in high winds either. He formed the opinion that someone had jumped over the fence at the side of the house, opened the shed door, the dog barked, the offender disturbed by the dog, then knocked over the items against the fence as he ran down the path at the side of the house, setting the security light off when he reached the front.

The explanation seemed a plausible hypothesis of the events. The attendant officer asked whether the victim thought it might have been the wind, he had then explained why he didn’t think so. ‘They said they would drive round the area … and that they would write a report and that it would go into basically an intelligence bank.’ The incident was concluded by the officer as ‘No sign of any break, [intelligence] form completed. Advice
given’. It is understandable that the officers may have been in a quandary whether a crime had been committed or not, if they believed the theory put forward by the victim, which they appear to have done, then because the shed door had been opened, an offence of attempted burglary was the most likely conclusion. This is an unusual set of circumstances when compared to the other incidents examined, perhaps the most similar incident involves the tale given by the elderly victim (see ante) who had heard a bang and her neighbours had allegedly seen three people run from the front of her property.

In both cases there is no definite evidence of an offence, either physical or witnessed and therefore officers are left with very little to base their assumptions on. What the example demonstrates is how difficult it can be for officers to decide whether a crime should be recorded or not. The likely outcome, given the pressures on officers, not only in respect of demands on their time but also the pressure not to record incidents as crimes that may not be crimes, can only be to err on the side of caution and therefore not record.

Another incident relating to an attempted criminal damage, criminal damage and harassment type offences, involving separate elderly victims, was concluded by the attendant officer as ‘No damage to callers house, damage to neighbours, however didn’t want to make a complaint, PNB signed …’. This incident, discussed previously, involved ongoing harassment from youths throwing stones at the caller’s window and, on this occasion, cracking a pane of glass in her neighbour’s window. Evidently the officer who attended did not recognise the need to deal with the ongoing problems, telling the caller that he would refer it on to a local beat police officer. However, there was no record that he had done so, nor had he recorded the very clear damage that had occurred to the neighbour’s window.

The last of the six incidents where the attendant officer had concluded the incident to show that no offences had been committed but had not apparently informed the victim as to why this was the case, involved a public order offence and is one which has also been
discussed previously. A group of youths had threatened to break into the caller's house and the officers had concluded the incident as: 'occupant and male had civil debt, both persons advised'. Whilst the occupant may have had a 'civil debt', the victim, who it was reported had been beaten up previously by the group of youths, was extremely frightened, as were his parents who were also in the house and had made a second call to the police. Dependant on the circumstances, the attendant officers may, or may not have had a power of arrest, but it would seem that the incident was sufficiently serious enough to suggest a notifiable offence had been committed albeit perhaps not in the presence of the officers.

Response by the attendant officer: Caller seen (other result)

Finally, further analysis revealed that twelve incidents, where an officer had seen the caller, had been concluded by the officer in a variety of different ways other than those already described. In these cases the interviewee had also not specifically stated whether they wished to pursue the matter or not. The resulting comments contained within these incident logs are grouped as: advice given, no complaint, area search: no trace, no trace, briefing board, and report submitted.

The incidents cover a range of events involving offences of predominately, public order and harassment but include one of vehicle interference. The incidents can be divided into two groups, those where the attendant officer provided the interviewee (caller) with a reason why they could not pursue the matter and those where they appeared to give no reason at all. Where the officer gave a reason, these included, the fact that there was no evidence available, no offences committed or that they were simply unable to do anything.

Dealing first with the six incidents where the officers had given a reason not to pursue the matter; three related to public order type offences, two involved harassment type offences and one involved an offence of harassment or threats to kill.
The first incident involved long running harassment of a family where the offender had previously, on numerous occasions, been driving his car in an erratic manner behind the interviewee while he was driving his car. The same had happened to his wife. The behaviour also included the offender driving his vehicle along the road adjacent to and just behind the interviewee’s wife. The interviewee had been subjected to ‘upsetting pictures’ being posted through his letterbox, there were pictures of his wife placed on a ‘dirty’ internet site, the offender had been seen taking pictures of his wife at the children’s school sports day and the interviewee had also had the tyres slashed on his car. He had phoned the police numerous times previously to report the incidents and had been told they were being looked into.

On this occasion he reported that he had recorded the offender on CCTV causing damage to property and that the offender had also tried to run him off the road that morning (see Interview 8, Appendix D). He went on to explain that he hadn’t told the officers about all of the problems he’d previously had. Instead he had told them to speak to a particular officer who knew all about it so that ‘then he could put them in the picture, rather than telling them and you know them going and doing something that might upset the apple cart’. He went on to say that although the officers had looked at the videotape of the incident ‘they couldn’t see the registration number so you know it was, it was nothing they could do about it’. The interviewee revealed a deep sense of annoyance and frustration at the inactivity of the police. The attendant officer concluded the incident as: ‘Dispute has been going on for two years. All parties advised’.

The interviewee had no idea whether the offender had been visited and spoken to. This was a messy and convoluted set of circumstances being reported to the officers, which probably would not have been quickly and easily resolved. However, there was undoubtedly, a course of conduct amounting to harassment and yet the officers chose to make promises to the future in order to avoid any further involvement, despite the fact that they had hard evidence, albeit limited, of the conduct of an offender on video. This
was not something that was lost on the interviewee who was fed up of being palmed off with excuses from a succession of officers.

A further incident reported was commenced: ‘Inf is being threatened by her ex-partner. He has threatened to kill her and says he is on his way round to her house now. She has received abusive emails and telephone calls, he has also threatened her friends’. Despite the apparent immediacy of the call, the incident log had been commented that there were ‘no units’, and further commented to show that the caller had been re-contacted and advised she should telephone ‘999’ if the ex-partner appeared at her house; some four hours later an officer arrived to see her.

The Interviewee described a long history of abuse involving her ex-partner and at times she became confused as to when certain events had occurred and was at first uncertain about what event was being discussed. The abuse had at one stage culminated in her ex-partner being taken to court, where he pleaded guilty to an offence of affray. This had stemmed from an incident where he had threatened her and her friend with a knife. He received a community service order and was also ordered to attend anger management courses. Following this, they were in contact with each other over child contact arrangements and the settling of financial issues. He became abusive again, sending her threatening emails and letters, arriving at her home address whilst drunk and driving up and down the road outside her house.

This occurred on numerous occasions and was typical of what could easily be described as stalking type behaviour. He had been threatening and abusive to her family and friends. The latest episode that had caused her to phone the police was a threat made, via her friend, that he was going to kill her and was on his way round to the house to do so. The friend fearing that this was the case had phoned the interviewee, who had in turn phoned the police. The interviewee described how two police officers had arrived at her house and told her there was nothing they could do unless her friends reported the matter
themselves. She explained how she was fearful for herself and her children and felt that no one was listening to her (see Interview 9, Appendix D).

She went on to explain that he had a probation officer and was undertaking an anger management course but his behaviour appeared to be getting worse. Considering the response that the interviewee received from the police, both initially in terms of the time it took for an officer to attend and following the attendant officers’ comments, it is of little surprise that she was concerned that the police were not taking the matter seriously. Apart from the serious offence of threats to kill, which on the face of it appear to be made out, there is a lengthy and detailed account of constant harassment.

The officers, given these details, had abundant cause for concern for the safety of the interviewee and more than enough detail to provide them with a power of arrest and the ability to take positive action. Instead, the incident was concluded by the officers as ‘Inft seen. States that an ex-partner has been making threats against her – not directly but to her friends. Advised to have her friends report directly. Inft to also see her probation/social worker’. This response demonstrates a clear lack of understanding of the law in respect of the offence of threats to kill, a lack of recognition of the fact that this is a course of conduct amounting to harassment and a failure by officers to recognise the risks of not taking any action. Surprisingly, this does not appear to have been picked up by the control room operators or any supervisors when closing the incident.

Another harassment type offence was reported in person at a police station and the officer that dealt with the matter created an incident as a record of the call. The victim when interviewed described how he had been subject of harassment over a period of two years by his ex-wife. He had been living in a neighbouring county at that time and had reported this to the police in that county but they appeared to have done nothing about it. He had now moved into the area and had received a card through the letter box which he described as: ‘was just like wanker and stuff on it and this sort of thing and almost like
the kind of, I’m telling you that I know where you live sort of thing’. He had attempted to
report this at one police station but the enquiry office staff had told him they couldn’t deal
with it and he would have to go to his local police station.

When he spoke to the police officer at his local station he was told the officer could take
the details as a first occurrence because it was only one incident that had occurred in the
area. He advised the interviewee to phone his previous police area to find out what was
happening with his case and if necessary to make a complaint. The interviewee
explained that he had done so and ‘strangely enough as a result of that on Thursday
night the pc who was dealing with it … phoned me to say an inspector had gone to her
house and had given her a verbal warning for a first offence under the Harassment Act’.
The interviewee was complimentary about the officer that he had spoken to at his local
police station:

… he listened and was quite interested whereas my experience of police in
the last two years, three years, while this has been going on has always
been me making the … allegation and them not taking any notice of it …
when I actually heard a policeman saying he was interested and he was
listening I was quite impressed by that.

However, the interviewee was somewhat bemused as to why the staff at the first police
station he visited had not wanted to deal with the incident. Although the officer had
impressed the interviewee, he did demonstrate a lack of understanding of the law or an
unwillingness to get too involved at that stage other than to offer advice. He told the
interviewee that if he got no joy from the police in his previous police area to get back to
him, so there may have been some reluctance simply because the matter was already
being dealt with. Since this was the case, the officer would not have had a need to
complete a crime record as this should have been completed in the first police area and
the latest conduct by the offender was just a continuance of the course of conduct. This
may be a simplification of the law in respect of a course of conduct but given the details explained by the interviewee it would be an appropriate analysis in this instance. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out a number of issues. Firstly, a course of conduct can be carried out across any number of police force areas, therefore to state that the incident could only be logged, as a first occurrence is erroneous. Secondly, a harassment warning has no basis in law and in any case a course of conduct had already been made out and therefore the full offence had occurred. A harassment warning is simply used as a means to formally take no further action and is in the majority of cases inappropriate in the circumstances.

Three further incidents involved the report of public order events that when the police had arrived had ceased and in two cases, the offenders had already left the scene. The first event reported was simply recorded as ‘7-8 youths shouting racist remarks at informant’. The interviewee explained that he was in his restaurant full of customers when youths burst in and shouted racist abuse and taunts at him and his staff. Officers arrived and spoke to the youths outside but:

… they couldn’t do anything, they haven’t seen nothing with their own eyes, I mean it’s like the officers wanted they had the clues right there in front of them, they’ve got CCTV on then it’s like they’ve got the public, forget us I mean right, we were involved but the public weren’t involved.

The interviewee explained there were a number of witnesses to the behaviour, both customers and passers by, who were willing to provide information to the police: ‘they came out and they said, these boys you know they’re out of order, they even said it to the police’. The incident was concluded by the officers as ‘[Report] submitted – tension indicator’.
The second event was that of an elderly lady reporting that her grandson had arrived at her address drunk and was trying to break in. When interviewed the lady explained her grandson was ‘extremely violent when he’s drunk. I was absolutely petrified so I did no more than rang the police because he’s quite known for putting out windows and goodness knows what ... it terrified me, terrified me’.

She went on to explain that he had been kicking the door with some force but fortunately had only left marks on the door, which she wiped off in the morning. When the police officers arrived ‘they asked me what it was, what happened, who he was, he’s well known to them, they said if he came back to phone immediately and they’d come back’. Asked if she expected the police to do anything she replied, ‘not really because there’s no criminal damage, there’s a couple of kick marks on the door which washed off the next morning, I don’t know if the police even looked at that, he hadn’t broken anything and so I thought there’s wasn’t really much they could do’.

The third event involved a call from a lady working in an off licence. Youths had been in the shop and one of them had stolen something and the youths had then proceeded to pull the shutters down outside the shop and threatened staff and customers. Customers were unable to leave the shop. One of the youths had been spoken to by the shop assistant: ‘I just said to him like you know if you’ve stolen anything can you put it back please and that’s when all that started like’. She described how the youth had told them ‘I know where you live, he goes, I know where you live as well ... he was just very abusive telling me to eff off and all that sort of thing. The incident was concluded by the officer as: ‘gone prior to arrival’. The caller stated she did discuss with the officer about what had happened and he had suggested some form of security but had apparently done no more than offer this advice.

The first two incidents discussed demonstrate either a lack of knowledge of the law or a lack of ability of the officers to think laterally in terms of what they could do about the
situation presented to them, or simply a lack of willingness to deal with the incident. In the first case there was clearly a public order offence with an abundance of evidence available to the officers from witnesses and possibly CCTV and yet despite having the offenders in front of them they chose not to act, to the disbelief of the victims. One of the problems, which the officers may have foreseen, was that because they had not witnessed the events themselves, they had no automatic power of arrest. Whilst the type of public order offences discussed, carried with them only a conditional power of arrest, that being found committing, the officers had other options open to them and may have considered conditional powers given to them under The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 or indeed common law powers relating to a breach of the peace. Failing this they could have taken the more circuitous route of interviewing the offenders on a voluntary basis and applying for summonses to be issued.

The second incident was even simpler, if the officers had thought about the incident they would have realised that not only had a public order offence been committed but also an attempted criminal damage, the latter providing them with a power of arrest. Considering the victim and her vulnerability some action should have been taken and even had they not thought of the first option, they could have used the same powers discussed ante.

The third is perhaps a little less simple because the offenders were not known and there was perhaps a limited investigation that could have taken place, but clearly a public order offence had been committed and possibly a theft. The officer had not recorded any crime and did not provide any clue as to whether he had considered that a crime had been committed.

The final six incidents involved public order or harassment type offences, bar one, which involved vehicle interference. Whilst the incidents were concluded by the attendant officers in a variety of different ways, that is, categorised as: no complaint, briefing board,
advice given and area search: no trace, the officers did not provide the caller or victim with any reason why this was the case.

The first of these cases involved threats made to an elderly man and his wife by a neighbour and apparently related to the removal of two abandoned cars by a contractor. It was clear that the police operator recognised the neighbour's name and commented the incident: 'high [priority] due to the history of [name] and the age of the inf'. Three officers were dispatched to the incident including a sergeant. The interviewee described how two cars parked outside his house that had no tax on them and were 'all smashed up' and had been removed by contractors. He described how the offender had waved his fist at the caller's wife and threatened him and had done so the following day as well. 'Well the police come up the first day but you know, you know your people seem to think it's nothing to do with them it's a domestic or whatever you know.' Asked to elaborate on what happened he replied:

Well when I went out there he said, I bloody hate you and I'll kill you if I get half a chance, he said if I don't do that I'll smash your car up and then he carried on and the next day he come round and said that he was gonna [sic] have a party from Friday till Monday. And he's gonna [sic] have his music up as loud as he wanted it.

Asked about the first day, he said that a number of police officers had arrived:

… they come and see me and went and saw him but when they went round … there, and one of his friends was there and they come back and see me and said he wasn't there, well he was, he was up in his bedroom, because he didn't go out, they said if it happens again to ring them again.
He stated these problems had been going on for a number of years and later said that ‘it’s the worst thing I ever done buying my house’. He expressed annoyance and anger at not being able to have the matters dealt with and explained, ‘well until he does something, they won’t do anything I don’t think … you see what annoys me about it, when my sons kick up about it, the police have warned both my sons that if they do anything about it they’ll arrest them’. The incident log simply reflects the result as ‘no complaints’. It is unclear why the matter wasn’t dealt with, and surprising since a supervisor was in attendance. The result of the incident is perhaps telling in its brevity, which was clearly misleading, as there was indeed a complaint.

The next two incident logs were linked and involved an elderly lady having eggs thrown at her house. The incident log in relation to the call from the elderly lady has been discussed ante and needs little further elaboration other than to say this was the second night in a row that she had been subjected to such behaviour and the previous night the eggs had been thrown at her and landed in her hallway. She described how she had to clean up the mess: ‘I quickly got some carpet cleaner and done that but I was crying while I was doing it. It has to be done straight away’. Asked about what the attendant police officer said he would do she replied, ‘he said they’ll be having a tour round like of an evening which they have been’.

This particular incident was reported at about 7.30 in the evening but earlier in the day the lady’s son had visited the local police station and spoken to a member of the enquiry office and an incident log was created which stated: Inf requesting passing attention by officers – last night yet again his 80 year old mother opened the door and egg came straight through and broke on carpet. Inf himself has also had eggs thrown up against the house’. The incident log was closed ‘Incident created and copy placed on duty board – also copy to Pc [name]’.
The interviewee expressed annoyance at the fact that the police didn’t appear to be doing anything about the problem and that police vehicles were driven around the area but nobody got out of the vehicles. What seemed clear is that this was just viewed by the police staff involved as a relatively trivial matter. The fact that the lady’s son had reported the matter at the police station and no action was taken other than a promise that the police would patrol the area was then compounded by the lack of action when the same problem occurred again. Given the age of the victim it was clear that action was required and in any event this was a harassment offence and an assault as described previously.

A further incident log examined was also linked to an incident log described earlier. In this case the caller described a fight involving four men going on in the hallway of a block of flats and in fact, a number of calls were received regarding this incident from residents, one of whom had been assaulted but had not been seen by the police. The caller when interviewed described how the incident had started because of a dispute between female neighbours. What had started out as a verbal dispute became physical and when one of the party’s boyfriend arrived the caller had told him to intervene but one of the women had rounded on her and called her ‘an effing bitch and go eff myself’. At that point she had phoned the police.

Asked what the police had said to her regarding the incident when they attended she replied, ‘they said well they thought it is best to let it go this time and they were going to go back and, I don’t know, liaise with your intelligence’. Whilst she wasn’t enamoured with this apparent lack of action, she went on to say ‘I don’t think there was anything more they could have done’. The interviewee described a catalogue of events and the fact that she, like most of the residents, was elderly and didn’t want to have to put up with this behaviour. The incident was concluded by the attendant officers as: ‘Dispute between number of residents. Advice given’. As already discussed ante apart from the obvious public order offence there was also an assault, but the attendant officers had not spoken to the victim.
Another incident involved a report of a woman who had made threatening telephone calls to the interviewee and had then arrived at her house and was banging on the door and being abusive and threatening. The interviewee described how she had been frightened at the time but the police had arrived and spoken to the offender who was known to her. They had then persuaded this woman to leave and had told the interviewee that if she returned they would arrest her. This appeared to satisfy the interviewee, who was not very forthcoming during the interview and was reluctant to provide any further details of the event.

The last incident involved vehicle interference where the caller witnessed a person attempting to break into a vehicle and was ‘ducking out the way every time a car came down the road’. The interviewee described how he had phoned the police and remained on the phone providing a description of the offender and a commentary regarding what was happening. A police officer arrived and found the vehicle had been broken into but unfortunately the offender had managed to escape unseen. The vehicle had clear damage to the drivers door lock and the interviewee spoke to the officer who stated they had the registration number of the vehicle and would contact the owner. This apparently hadn’t occurred and a crime record was not generated as a result of the incident. The incident log indicates that the keeper of the vehicle was in fact a garage and a new registration document had been issued. This obviously made it difficult for the officers to notify the owner. The incident log shows the result as: ‘No trace of offender, PNC [Police National Computer] updated with damage’.

Where officers cannot confirm a crime with the owner, there is an apparent reluctance to record a crime. Often the reason given is that the owner may have abandoned the vehicle, although in this case it is highly unlikely as the vehicle was only a year old. Another reason often provided to explain this reluctance to record a crime in these circumstances is that access gained to the vehicle was somehow legitimate, that is, the owner may have given permission. Although, given the circumstances described and
damage caused to the vehicle around the door lock, it appears highly unlikely that this was someone trying to enter the vehicle with the ‘owner’s permission’. Reasons given for failure to record crimes in these circumstances can be linked back to the group discussions held with officers regarding apparently abandoned vehicles (see Chapter 11).

**What the caller wanted**

When interviewed the interviewees were asked what it was they wanted or expected when they initially phoned the police and where applicable, what it was they wanted or expected when the police arrived.

After examination of the interview data, the initial expectation, that is when the person made the call, was coded into five different categories consisting of: don’t know, log incident, obtain advice, and obtain positive action. The results are set out in Table B3. In most cases, the caller initially wanted to obtain positive action. This was voiced in thirty-nine (78%) of the fifty incidents and interviews examined, and although the caller wasn’t always aware of what the police could or might do, they wanted officers to attend and deal with the incidents in a positive manner. In some cases it was simply a matter of having an officer attend the incident: ‘Obviously just go there and check it out … and make sure that whoever was living in those houses was safe from that bloke who was trying to break in or chuck stuff at them’; ‘Yeah I’m happy they took it seriously, put it that way.’

Whilst in other cases the caller expected more: ‘They would go out and catch them’; ‘Well come and look for him isn’t it … well arrest him then isn’t it’; ‘Well, if there was a constable round there and they found eggs on them, you’ve got them haven’t you’; ‘Well I thought he’d catch them in the act and you know, I don’t know, arrest them for it or you know or go and see the parents’; ‘If it means prosecution then I would do that to stop this happening to somebody else … that’s what my understanding was, involving the police to take it further’.
At times the caller just wanted the police to warn off the offender: ‘We just don’t like threats being made and I thought maybe if the police did go down it might shake her up you know, you just can’t go round threatening people’; ‘Well put a stop to it you know, I don’t want no trouble or anything like that’.

Further analysis was undertaken to ascertain whether this initial thought process had changed in those cases where the informant had been seen by a police officer. In total within this category there were twenty-five cases where the caller had been seen by a police officer. Having voiced the opinion that initially they wanted some form of positive action, in six cases the interviewee stated that they expected the offender to be prosecuted after the officer had seen them. In effect, the reason for calling the police was that an officer would attend and see them and take the matter further through the courts: ‘we wanted to prosecute him really … I know it’s him’; ‘He’s just going to keep on until he’s taken to court and bound over to keep the peace’.

In four cases, the interviewee expected the officer to warn the offender regarding their behaviour. In three cases the interviewee expected the incident to be logged and in the rest of the cases the interviewee expected no action at all. In the latter cases it was sometimes clear that the interviewee had been told and persuaded, that nothing further could be done: ‘I wouldn’t have bothered because I knew what the answer would be, you know, nothing to do with you’; ‘They explained that because there was no criminal act, they couldn’t actually act upon it, we understood that …’; ‘He hadn’t broken anything and so I thought well there wasn’t really much they could do’.

In some cases, the interviewee was pragmatic about the options for the police stating they thought the police had done all they could and that the incident probably wasn’t high on their agenda. In a few cases no action was taken simply because the interviewee had decided they didn’t want any further action: ‘The blokes not really worth going to court over and just can’t be bothered with him, its just hassle in the future from it’.
In those cases where the interviewee expected the attendant officer to warn the offender, it was at times apparent that this was a decision made by the victim but only after they had been dissuaded by the officer from pursuing the matter formally. In a case where the officer had made it clear to the victim and his mother that he would have to go through the courts and all that this entailed the mother said, ‘He said that he, you know, would do it on a domestic level, they asked him which way he wanted to go and that’s what he decided’. Asked whether she was happy with this approach the mother replied, ‘Well yeah, I’ll give it a go, if it’s going to, you know … if they’re going to do what they say they’re going to do and get this man to speak to them and find out what is actually going on ….’ When put to the interviewee that the police could take a statement and arrest the offender she replied, ‘Well I would have been happy about that’.

In other cases, it was clear that because the officer had sorted the matter out the victim was happy for the offenders simply to be warned: ‘… and then he called the other boys that did throw the eggs and threatened them that if they did it anymore he’d charge them … their parents were there as well and I think it just frightened them all, which is some of the time that’s all it needed’.

Where the interviewee was minded that the incident should just be logged, more often than not it was because the attendant officer(s) had informed the interviewee that this was what they would do and that there was no further action that could be taken: ‘… and that they would report on it and that they would write a report on it and it would go into basically an intelligence bank … because there’s not really a lot [else] they could do’; ‘They said in the absence of criminal damage there wasn’t anything they could do, and that … we’ve got their names’; ‘… They’ve noted it and they said if it happens again they’d come back and get a full statement and they’d then arrest these people for harassment’. In this case when asked whether the police could have done anything better the interviewee retorted, ‘Yeah, nick them and throw away the key’.
In a number of cases the interviewee simply wanted the officers to attend to disperse the offenders: ‘You know, but it was just the fact that there was somebody there then I knew that I would be safe’; ‘They just asked her to, I think they just asked her to leave and they just waited till she left and then they went … I was quite happy with what they did’; ‘To get them off the property innit [sic]’.

In four cases the caller had phoned the police initially to obtain advice but had wanted a police officer to attend in person rather than discussing the matter over the telephone. The first case involved an assault on a young girl. Her mother had made the decision to deal with the matter through the school but had wanted to discuss this with the police initially. In the second case the caller had just been assaulted by her ex-partner who had left the scene therefore the initial call was somewhat confused and she merely wanted the police to turn up. She explained that the officers had arrived and after speaking to them: ‘Well I wasn’t sure at the time whether or not if I pressed charges it would actually make things worse for myself’. She said she was told the officers would log the matter.

Two further cases involved public order and harassment, in the first the caller wanted the police to visit her and then wanted the officers to see the offender and warn him and in the second the caller wanted the officers to prevent further occurrences. By the time the officer had arrived the offenders had left on this occasion.

Where the interviewee stated they didn’t know what their expectations were when they contacted the police, one incident involved an assault and the victim did not wish to pursue the matter and therefore their expectation when speaking to a police officer was that no action would be taken, one involved an attempted burglary, where the expectation was that the police would turn out and when they arrived the victim expected that the matter would be logged and one involved a public order type incident and the victim didn’t expect any action would be taken.
From the overall analysis it was clear that callers do not always have a clear expectation of the service that is going to be provided, other than that the police would attend to resolve the issue (see Ekblom and Heal 1982; Waddington 1993). In some cases the caller did not want the police to attend but wanted the incident logged in case anything happened in the future. Once the police officer(s) had arrived the expectation of the callers varied. In some cases they wanted the police to take some positive action to arrest the offender and deal with them through the court process, in other cases they simply wanted the offender warned or dispersed or they simply wanted the matter logged. Sometimes the callers were pragmatic about what the police could do and it appeared to them there was little more that could be done, although this thought process was sometimes influenced by the officers and what they had conveyed to the victims. Clearly the interaction between the caller or victim, the control room operator and the attendant officer influenced the manner in which each incident was handled.

Further analysis was undertaken to ascertain whether the victim had been informed about what would happen by the police officer or what action the police officer had proposed to take. Of the thirty-two incidents attended by officers where the victim was seen, in six cases, the officer did not tell the victim or caller what action they proposed to take and in two of these cases the officer did not provide the victim or caller with any result. In total six victims or callers were not informed of the outcome by the police officers. Two of these cases related to reported assaults, three related to public order or harassment offences and one related to vehicle interference.

In all but one of the latter cases the caller had an expectation when they phoned the police that positive action would be taken. In both of the assault cases the expectation was that the offender would be warned but there was no subsequent contact from the police to inform them of any outcome.
Interviewees were, where possible, asked whether they thought that the incident that had occurred was a crime and whether they thought it should be recorded as such. Of the fifty incidents examined, nearly half (n = 23) of the interviewees in each case thought that what had occurred was a crime and that the police should record it: ‘I do actually because these people are too old to be troubling a kid of thirteen’; ‘I mean it is a crime to just even come into our garden isn’t it and try and, you know, [get into the house]’; ‘Oh yes, because I mean there was a crime, they broke somebody’s property, they had no right to and at the end of the day they had no right to intimidate people who you know are unable to protect themselves’; ‘Oh yeah, I’d obviously expect you to like record it and obviously deal with it in the way you have to deal with it’; ‘Well an attempted crime, if they’re trying door handles’.

Other interviewees weren’t sure whether the incident should be recorded as a crime or not: ‘Well I think it becomes very complicated, it sits underneath domestic violence or something, I’m not sure’. The most common response when asked this question was that they just didn’t know.

Finally further analysis of the data took place to ascertain whether the victim had identified the offender. In twenty-six of the fifty cases examined, the offender was identified, generally by name but on occasions by the fact that an officer had turned up at the time the caller or victim was watching the offender. The relevance of this is the missed opportunities by the police to detect crime and perhaps some anecdotal evidence that performance around detected crime is not an all encompassing persuasive driving force for officers to take action. Of course the assumption being that officers recognised the incident as a crime in the first place, this in a number of cases is doubtful. Not surprisingly, most of the reported incidents involved assaults, harassment and public order type offences. One-fifth involved criminal damage, one involved threats to commit criminal damage and one involved vehicle interference.
Conclusions

Although officers attended most incidents they did not see the caller in every case and where they didn’t, no subsequent attempt was made to contact the caller either by the officer or by the control room operators. In two of the incidents the attending officer(s) actually spoke to the offenders but subsequently allowed them go on their way. The caller had not only witnessed the criminal activity but had also witnessed the officers speaking to the offenders. Had the officer(s) or the control room operator contacted the caller, the officer(s) would have been in a far stronger position to take positive action.

Where officers did see the caller, there were a variety of ways in which the incident was concluded such as: no offences, advice given, no complaint, area search: no trace, no trace, briefing board, and report submitted. Callers were often left wondering what the outcome of their case was even when they had seen an officer, particularly where officers had made promises to the future of action which clearly they had no intention of carrying out. These findings accord with the Black (1968) who described patrol officers’ techniques to avoid ‘unnecessary or unproductive work’ (1976, p. 10) when dealing with members of the public. The lack of action by officers in a number of cases pointed to the fact that they did not see the incident ‘as “proper” policing duties’ and displayed ‘a general desire to “ease” the job’ (Burrows and Tarling 1987, p. 235) by taking as little action as possible. There were also clear indications that the age, sex, race and social class of the victim had an impact on the manner in which the incident was concluded.

In a small number of cases the victim made the decision not to pursue the matter following a conversation with the officer concerned. It was clear that officers made attempts to dissuade the victims by outlining the burden of the process and the potential disruption to the victim in the future. Not all victims were dissuaded by officers and more often than not had their own reasons for not pursuing the case, but the actions of the officers did not promote a positive outlook.
A few cases revealed misrepresentation by officers of the facts both to the victim, in terms of what the officer could do, or to the control room operator in order to minimise the event and to justify a lack of action. This appeared to be particularly relevant where the incident was only slightly complex and was particularly prevalent if juveniles were involved, where there may have been identification issues or where there was no apparent immediate available power of arrest. The type of victim involved appeared to have a bearing on the outcome, particularly those who may have been easily dissuaded from making a complaint and equally as easily persuaded that nothing could be done, for example the elderly.

In seventy-eight per cent of the cases the caller initially wanted to obtain positive action from the police and although the caller wasn’t always aware of what the police could or might do, they wanted officers to attend and deal with the incidents in a responsive manner. In some cases it was simply a matter of having an officer attend the incident to offer some form of feeling of security or peace of mind.

Once the police officer(s) had arrived, the expectation of the callers varied and included a requirement to arrest the offender and deal with them through the court process, warning the offender, dispersing the offenders or simply logging the matter. Callers were pragmatic about what the police could do and expectations were not particularly high, although this was often influenced by what they had been told by officers or operators.
Chapter 10 Data analysis: Tracking incidents

This chapter describes the results from the incident tracking exercise undertaken to assess the way in which the three forces translated ‘calls for service’ (Home Office 2000, p. 15) received from members of the public into crime records, where it was appropriate to do so. As described in Chapter 7 not all ‘calls for service’ relate to crime therefore the initial work comprised of distilling crime incidents from the overall incident population.

In total, 3000 incident logs were initially examined across the three forces and nearly half, 1445 (48%), were considered to be ‘possible’ crime events (force A: n = 430; force B: n = 589; force C: n = 426). The decision to code these as ‘possible’ crime events was arrived at firstly by examination of the initial text or coding applied by the police operator when recording an incident, and then matching this to a definition of a crime as laid down in statute and finally having regard to the requirements of the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 1998c).

The ‘possible’ crime event incident logs were further analysed and just over forty percent (595) were adjudged not to be crime events. Typical examples of these were incident logs that related to burglar alarms. These accounted for 181 (12.5%) of all ‘possible’ crime events, and 29.9 per cent of the subsequent adjudged non-crime events. Only three incident logs, resultant of alarm activations, were found to relate to a crime within the overall ‘possible’ crime events category. Other examples of incidents that were not coded as crime events related to ‘suspicious persons’. In these cases, when a resource was dispatched to investigate, there was no indication that a crime had been committed and more often than not the ‘suspicious person’ could not be found. Further examples
included reports of a fight, often anonymous, whereupon arrival of the police there was no indication that a fight had taken place. Domestic disputes provided further examples where, within the initial text of the incident log there was an indication that a disturbance was taking place in private premises, but on further investigation officers reported back that this was in fact only a verbal dispute and therefore no criminal act had taken place and there was nothing within the log to suggest otherwise (see Farrington and Dowds 1985).

Eight hundred and fifty incidents, (28.3%) of the overall incident logs, were finally categorised as ‘alleged’ crime incidents (force A: n = 250; force B: n = 347; force C: n = 253). These were incidents where the initial text or coding, taken together with the full commentary within the log and taking into account the final closing comments and codes, indicated an expectation that a crime should be recorded. In some cases (n = 35) the incidents examined, involved multiple crimes and therefore, of the 850 ‘alleged’ crime incidents, a minimum\(^\text{16}\) of 897 crime records were expected to be recorded. However, only 649 (72.4%) crimes were recorded resultant from 614 (72.2%) ‘alleged’ crime incidents (force A: n = 180; force B: n = 293; force C: n = 141).

These figures fall slightly below the average seventy-six per cent reported by the HMIC inspection (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) but are comparable with the seventy-one per cent of ‘definite’ allegations reported by Burrows et al (2000). The percentage of incidents recorded as a crime when taking into account all ‘possible’ crime events is reduced considerably to 42.5 per cent, slightly lower than the forty-seven per cent reported by Burrows et al (2000). Of the thirty-five ‘alleged’ crime incidents that

\(^{16}\) It was at times difficult to discern exactly how many crimes should have been recorded. Often the text within the logs referred to multiple victims but did not provide an exact count. For example ‘several cars parked along a street damaged by a group of youths’. 
gave rise to an expectation that more than one crime would be recorded, seven incidents resulted in no crime at all and three resulted in only one crime.

Undoubtedly, the explanation for the differences in the reported recording rates lies in the interpretation of the content of the incident log as well as an interpretation of what is deemed and not deemed to be an allegation of a crime. Both the Burrows et al (2000) and Farrington and Dowds (1985) studies distinguished between ‘definite’ and ‘possible’ allegations. The former being allegations made in respect of unambiguous reports such as burglary and shoplifting, whilst the latter involved less easily discernable reports of activity such as interfering with vehicles or disorderly behaviour, domestic disputes, threats, and other suspicious types of activity such as prowlers.

It is clear that a distinction should be made between those incidents where seemingly indisputable facts support a clear allegation of crime and those incidents that may simply appear to be such, that is, are based on conjecture. However, it is a significant leap of faith to suggest all ‘possible’ allegations contribute to either recording or under-recording results, particularly where the circumstances surrounding the allegation cannot be substantiated any further by the collection of additional information. Many of the ‘possible’ allegations do not, on face value, fit into any definition within the law. For example, reports of domestic disputes and public disturbances or indeed prowlers are indicative of possible criminal acts but without further investigation and the gathering of additional information it is unwise to suggest they are de facto crimes and therefore the conclusion to be drawn is that there is an apparent need to recognise the reported recording rates with some scepticism. As Burrows et al (2000) note the differences between their research results and that of Farrington and Dowds (1985) ‘may be partly attributable to differences between the two studies in ‘setting a lower limit’ for ‘possible’ allegations. Farrington and Dowds (1985) noted that they excluded completely ‘reports of missing persons, noisy parties, drunks, warnings about future crimes, etc’ (p. 44).
Likewise, the tendency towards an ‘evidential’ approach adopted by HMIC (2000a) is likely to exclude categories of incident where it is more likely than not that a crime has occurred and would almost certainly exclude ‘possible’ allegations which may ultimately have been reported crimes. A witness reporting persons tampering with a motor vehicle would on the ‘balance of probabilities’ be reporting a crime and yet very often on police arrival there is no indication that an offence has been committed, that is, there is no physical evidence such as a damaged lock or widow. Nonetheless, the witness, were they to be spoken to by an attendant officer, would perhaps provide sufficient detail to suggest on the ‘balance of probabilities’ that a crime had been committed.

During examination of incidents, it became apparent that all too often a lack of follow up action by the attending police officer(s) to locate and speak to witnesses led to an inconclusive picture of the events that had taken place. In a number of cases it would be wholly wrong to suggest a crime had not been committed and likewise wrong to suggest it had. This in itself is sufficient cause to suggest that the application of any methodology solely using police incident data does not sufficiently test the validity of recording rates, and the use of that incident data can only ever provide a proxy measure. The caveat therefore is that the findings of any such research should be treated with some caution, as there will always be a significantly wide margin of error.

A ‘balance of probabilities’ approach, as undertaken in this study, attempts to bridge the gap between the ‘prima facie’ and ‘evidential’ approaches but should likewise be viewed in the same context, that is, there are a number of reported incidents where, without any further information, it is impossible to draw any definite conclusions, a fact recognised by Burrows et al (2000, p. 42) when they excluded ‘a total of 728 allegations’ from their count.
Both the recorded and unrecorded ‘alleged’ crime incidents were categorised by crime type and further analysis was undertaken to identify those incidents that had been dealt with over the telephone and those that had been attended by a police officer. Overall 229 ‘alleged’ crime incidents had been dealt with over the telephone (force A: n = 48; force B: n = 104; force C: n = 77) and accounted for 26.7 per cent of all such incidents. These incidents, dealt with over the telephone, typically involved crime desk or control room staff and dependent on the structure of the force, the ratio of those dealt with by each group differed.

Of the incidents dealt with over the telephone, sixty-five (28%) did not result in a crime being recorded (force A: n = 18; force B: n = 5; force C: n = 42). A significant proportion of those incidents that were not recorded had been closed by control room staff and involved a broad spectrum of offences. In contrast, those that were dealt with by the crime desk staff were invariably recorded as a crime. However, force B\textsuperscript{17} appeared to only have an error rate of five per cent across both groups, suggesting that its systems for recording crime dealt with over the telephone were substantially better than the other two forces with error rates of 37.5 per cent and 54.5 per cent respectively for all ‘alleged’ crime incidents dealt with in this manner.

It was notable that in some cases in force A, control room staff closed incidents some hours after the initial call without the caller having been seen or an officer having attended the incident (n = 8), despite the fact that the incident had initially been graded for attendance. There was often no clear explanation within the content of the incident logs to suggest why this should have occurred, although in most cases, it was apparent from the log transactions that vain attempts had been made to identify and dispatch a free resource. It would appear that on a number of occasions there were none available.

\textsuperscript{17} Force B had previously been severely criticised by HMIC regarding its recording practices. As a consequence the force introduced a stringent ‘ethical’ recording policy.
or once assigned to deal with that particular incident, they were diverted to deal with more pressing matters after initially being dispatched.

In a number of cases, the incident was such that by the time a resource had become free, it was unlikely that the person reporting the incident would be available at the location from where they had made the call or that the attendance of an officer would have located an offender. Reports of youths causing damage, assaults, public order and threats to commit criminal damage were typical of the sort of incidents falling into this category. After several hours had elapsed, and with the absence of any further calls, the incidents were downgraded from that requiring an urgent response to that requiring a slow time response and then closed as requiring no response at all.

A number of hypotheses for this behaviour might be put forward. A cynical view might suggest that owing to the type of crime, there was little likelihood of the crime being detected and therefore were an officer to be allocated to attend, effort would be expended on an unproductive activity. Such a hypothesis might be founded on the observations of previous commentators in that, as with officers on the street, staff within control rooms are also subject to social, political, organisational and situational pressures (Coleman and Moynihan 1996) and therefore have their own interpretation of “proper” policing duties “working considerations” or a general desire to “ease” the job’ (Burrows and Tarling 1987, p. 235). Similarly they may perceive that a report by a victim may be mistaken or disingenuous or there is insufficient evidence that a crime has been committed. Some incidents may, after re-examination and in light of conflicting and ever changing demands, become regarded as too trivial to warrant formal police action or may be seen as already satisfactorily resolved, as noted by Kershaw et al (2000) when explaining some of the differences between police crime statistics and findings of the British Crime Survey.
The rationale behind the premature closing of such incidents may also lie in a calculated assumption that if the victim wished to report the crime they would contact the police again. Such a belief may be exacerbated by the need to deal with constantly changing demands, a notion of diminished urgency of needing to attend that particular incident and pressure from senior officers to ‘manage down’ incident lists. Another explanation for the error rate in those ‘alleged’ crime incidents dealt with over the telephone, particular in force C appeared to involve process issues. This typically related to incidents that were created with the intention that they would be picked up by a crime desk at a later stage with a view to the crime desk contacting the person that had reported the incident. More often than not this did not appear to occur and the incident failed to be satisfactorily resolved despite the fact that it had been flagged as a crime.

Of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents involving officers on the street (n = 621), there were two cases in force A, where the incident was reported to an officer on the street and the reporting person was directed to the police station to formally report the incident. The incidents although logged, did not result in crime records and were closed by the control room operator as ‘no further police action’. In both cases the person reporting was a third party who had witnessed criminal damage occurring and in both cases the officer receiving the report was busy dealing with another incident.

Incidents were examined where an officer was dispatched and arrived at the scene (n = 619). Of these, 169 (27.8%) of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents were not recorded as a crime (force A: n = 50; force B: n = 49; force C: n = 70). Figure 1 depicts the incidents against recorded crime in each crime category excluding those dealt with by way of telephone resolution. As previously discussed, in a number of cases the incident log indicted that an officer was required to attend the scene but ultimately no officer was dispatched. These were excluded from the resourced incidents count but included in the count for those dealt with by way of telephone resolution.
Figure 1 Incidents Attended by Officers Recording Rates by Crime Type

* Excludes incidents that were initially categorised as requiring attendance but where an officer did not attend
Amongst the incidents where an officer attended, the lowest recording rate was in the category of ‘threats to commit damage’ (16.7%) and the highest in the category ‘burglary non dwelling’ (94%). Notably crimes against the person were less likely to be recorded than crimes involving property. Only 49.7 per cent of crimes against the person offences were recorded as crimes compared to eighty-one per cent of crimes involving property.

Once again, the findings of this research support those found by Burrows et al (2000) in so far as the previous work found that forty-nine per cent of ‘violence against the person offences’ in the category of ‘definite’ allegations were recorded as crimes and seventy-seven per cent of property offences in the same category were recorded as crimes. For the purposes of this research, crimes against the person included common assault/assault occasioning actual bodily harm (ABH), harassment, minor public order\textsuperscript{18}, robbery, and threats to commit damage.

Although threats to commit criminal damage are classed within the Home Office Counting Rules alongside criminal damage as crimes against property, they have been categorised in this instance as crimes against the person. They tend to involve the victim, more than they involve any actual property that is; the threat is made to the victim regarding a future action to damage property\textsuperscript{19}. Likewise, robbery involves the theft or attempted theft of property but the use of force or the threat of force is directed at a person. The ‘other’ category has been excluded from both counts of crimes against property and crimes against the person on the basis that it includes both types of crime but usually of a far more serious nature. In general terms this included serious assaults, sexual assaults, and the likes of property crimes such as fraud and forgery.

\textsuperscript{18} Minor public order offences exclude offences of Affray, Violent Disorder and Riot as defined under the Public Order Act 1986.

\textsuperscript{19} It is not clear from the Burrows et al (2000) research whether such distinctions were made and whether threats to commit criminal damage offences were considered property offences or ‘offences against the person’.
The examination of recording rates across the spectrum tends to suggest that recording is not simply about crime types but about a relationship between crime type, the victim, the recording officer and available information and evidence. As noted in previous research, the more evidence available, the more likely a crime is to be recorded (Burrows et al, 2000; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b).

Visible evidence such as that found at a scene of a burglary provides little doubt that a crime has occurred. In these circumstances it is likely that an officer will be presented not just with the account of a victim but also with physical evidence such as damage to doors or locks at a point of entry and evidence of an untidy search. There may also be obvious signs that property has been removed, for example, an empty television stand or jewellery box. There is also, from an officer’s point of view, rarely any intangible suggestion that the victim is somehow responsible for his or her own misfortune.

A threat to commit damage is often made verbally and devoid of any such visible sign. An assault, although often apparent from injuries received, can be construed as being resultant of the victim’s actions as much as those of their assailant. In other words, from an officer’s viewpoint, it is far simpler to accept a burglary on face value than it is to accept certain types of assault.

Theft from shop is another such example; more often than not the original call to the police is resultant of a shoplifter having been apprehended by store staff. Consequently the police are presented with a set of circumstances where the offender and the goods that they allegedly stole are readily to hand. Contrast this with a victim reporting that their purse has been stolen perhaps in a town centre. The latter is likely to be treated with some scepticism and a belief by the police that it is feasible the purse was lost (see also Burrows et al 2000).
Whilst determining whether a crime has occurred can, in some cases, be problematic, significant difficulties can also arise in those cases where on the face of it there is clear evidence that a crime has occurred. Examples of this are more readily apparent in cases where there is organisational tension in recording various crime types. An incident where a window is broken can be resultant of an accident, for example, youths playing with a football, or it may be criminal damage where the intent of the offender was simply to break a window, or it may be an attempted burglary. An officer presented with a broken window and no offender to question is required to make decisions based on the information and evidence available. The tension arises where targets are set and police effectiveness is measured on certain criteria such as the number of burglaries committed in a specific locality. On the one hand recording a criminal damage is likely to have little impact on recorded crime targets and will probably result in little work for the police officer\(^20\), on the other hand the recording of burglary will result in a significant amount of work (Burrows and Tarling 1987) and adds to the recorded crime tally in a category that is measured.

Recording of crime is therefore not simply about a crime record but about what type of crime record is created. Consequently not only are recording rates called into question but also the classification of crime that is recorded may shift according to differing and conflicting priorities. Table B4 provides an overall synopsis of the incidents examined and the crime types showing the percentages of crimes that were recorded in each category.

As previously discussed, under-recording appears to be more prominent within certain crime types and this under-recording is symptomatic of a number of phenomena at play. One such phenomenon appears to be the status of the person reporting the incident.

\(^{20}\) Most records of criminal damage are 'screened out' and filed if there are no specific leads to follow.
Status was categorised into victim (split into personal victim and commercial or corporate victim), friend/relative witness, friend/relative non-witness, third party witness, third party non-witness and police officer.

Burrows et al (2000) state that offences reported by victims are more likely to be recorded than those crimes that are reported on behalf of the victims or are victimless crimes; this data was disaggregated further to explain this phenomenon. As shown in Table 2, incidents reported by the victim (n = 630) account for 74.1 per cent of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents. In the case of commercial or corporate victims, the report is generally made by an employee reporting the matter on behalf of a company or corporate body.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting person</th>
<th>Number of incidents reported</th>
<th>Percentage of total incidents</th>
<th>Number unrecorded</th>
<th>Percentage unrecorded</th>
<th>Percentage of total unrecorded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend/relative Non witness</td>
<td>51 (1*)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/relative witness</td>
<td>21 (1*)</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party Non witness</td>
<td>42 (7*)</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7 (1*)</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third party witness</td>
<td>88 (19*)</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>42 (5*)</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Victim</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Victim</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total incidents</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures in brackets show the number of reported incidents in the category where the victim was a commercial or corporate victim and someone reported the incident other than the victim or their employee.

Of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by victims, 74.4 per cent (n = 469) are recorded as crimes; however, there is a marked difference between the recording rates for personal victims (70.1%) and commercial or corporate victims (87.3%). Overall, of the 850 ‘alleged’ crime incidents population, there were 193 that related to commercial or
corporate victims of which twenty-six were not recorded as crimes (13.5%). A large proportion (81.9%) of ‘alleged’ crime incidents where the victim was a commercial or corporate body were reported by the victim (n = 158), whereas a smaller percentage (71.8%) of ‘alleged’ crime incidents involving personal victims (n = 657) were reported by the victim (n = 472).

The differences in recording rates for personal victims and commercial or corporate victims may be explained by the fact that the latter tends to relate to ‘offences against property’ such as burglary, criminal damage, fraud or theft, whereas the former is a mixture of property crime and crimes against the person. As discussed previously, crimes against property are more likely to be recorded than crimes against the person. However, the data also highlights that the reporting person, whether that be a victim, witness, relative or friend also has a bearing on the recording rates.

A little over fifteen per cent of ‘alleged’ crime incidents (n = 130) are reported by third parties, that is, persons who are not victims or friends/relatives of the victim, and two thirds of these purport to have witnessed the incident. Of these incidents, 37.7 per cent are unrecorded with the greater proportion being amongst those incidents that are actually witnessed. Similar recording rates apply to incidents reported by friends/relatives with 36.1 per cent being unrecorded and once again the greater proportion of these, although the difference is not as marked, are witnessed. To better understand these results, the status of the reporting person was matched against the alleged crime type and the final outcome in cases where the ‘alleged’ crime incident had not resulted in a recorded crime. See Tables B5, B6, B6A and 6B.

Overall seventy-two incidents were reported across the category of ‘reported by friends or relatives’, forty-six of which were recorded (63.9%). Fifty-one incidents were reported in the category friend/relative non-witness, 35 (68.6%) of which were recorded and in the category friend/relative witness, twenty-one incidents were reported and only eleven
(52.4%), were recorded. Just under half (47.7%) of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents that were reported by a friend or relative involved ‘offences against the person’ (n = 41), twenty-two of which did not result in a recorded crime. In this category assault was the most prevalent (n = 31), fifteen of which did not result in a recorded crime. Where a friend or relative did not witness the event, it appeared more likely that the crime would not be recorded owing to the fact that a complaint was not forthcoming from the victim (n = 10).

Of the twenty-six incidents, that were not recorded, in the overall category involving a report by friends or relatives, eleven (42.3%) were shown as closed on the incident logs using the term ‘advice given’. Just over half of these included the comments that ‘no complaint’ had been made. A further eight incidents suggested that either there were ‘no offences’ or that ‘enquiries had been completed’ or ‘no further action’ was required. In all of these there was no justification provided in the content of the incident logs to suggest why this was the case and nothing to rebut the original information recorded on the log by the control room operator. Ten incidents in these two categories were dealt with over the telephone and five (50%) of these did not result in a crime record being raised. Four of the cases related to ‘offences against the person’ and the fifth related to a report of a theft of a vehicle.

A similar exercise to that used to analyse reports by relatives or friends was conducted to examine incidents that had been reported by third parties. Only forty-two (4.9%) of the reported ‘alleged’ crime incidents were instigated by a third party non-witness of which seven (16.7%) resulted in no crime record being created. Fifteen of those reported in this category related to crimes against the person with twelve falling within the less serious category of common assault/ABH. However, eighty-eight (10.4%) of the reported ‘alleged’ crime incidents were instigated by third party witnesses of which, forty-two (47.8%) resulted in no crime record being created.
Twenty-three of these reported in this category related to crimes against the person with twenty falling within the less serious categories of common assault/ABH and minor public order. Almost half (n = 11) of the offences reported by third party witnesses that related to ‘offences against the person’ resulted in no crime record being created. In two cases, it was apparent that arrests had been made and yet a crime record was not created, instead the offenders were, in one instance charged with being drunk and disorderly and in the second, detained for a breach of the peace. These two incidents highlight the difficulties faced by officers in deciding which offences to pursue. In both instances the course taken by the officers appeared to be correct, in so far as both cases fell within the definitions of the offences for which the offenders were detained and charged with. However, the offences also fell within the definition of offences under the Public Order Act 1986. The latter being ‘notifiable offences’ in terms of crime statistics.

The data confirmed that, in the main, third party reports tend to involve incidents where evidence is less well defined or tangible such as persons who have witnessed offenders interfering with a motor vehicle or other incidents. For example criminal damage incidents that are apparently crimes but where, a victim is not immediately apparent or available. Typically incident logs rarely show the reporting person as having been seen or spoken to by attending officers in order to confirm the information that they had provided, despite the fact that they appeared contactable. Hence a significant number (27%) of incidents reported by a third party are closed as ‘area search negative’ or ‘enquiries completed/no further police action’ (33%). Of the 130 ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by a third party, twenty-six (20%) involved a commercial or corporate victim of which six did not result in a recorded crime. Ten incidents in the third party reporting category were dealt with over the telephone, nine of which were not recorded as crimes. Three of these reported incidents related to a commercial or corporate victim of which only one did not result in a recorded crime.
Further analysis regarding the alleged crime types and final outcome was conducted in relation to those crimes reported by victims. As previously indicated, for the purposes of the research, victims have been split into two categories, those that are commercial or corporate bodies and those that are personal victims. Table 6A relates to personal victims and table 6B relates to commercial or corporate victims. Of the 472 ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims, 331 (68%) were recorded as crimes and of the 472 ‘alleged’ crime incidents, 134 (28.3%) related to ‘offences against the person’ with only forty-five (33.6%) being recorded as crimes. The largest proportion of these related to:

- ABH/common assault, sixty-five incidents with twenty-eight (43.1%) recorded;
- Harassment, twenty-two incidents with six (27.3%) recorded;
- Minor public order, twenty-two incidents with two (9.1%) recorded; and
- Threats to damage, eleven incidents with one (9.1%) recorded.

The largest proportion of ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims related to ‘offences against property’ (n = 332) of which 283 (85.2%) were recorded. The largest proportion of these related to:

- Theft from vehicle, fifty-nine incidents with fifty-five (93.2%) recorded;
- Theft of vehicle, fifty-three incidents with fifty (94.3%) recorded;
- Theft, forty-nine incidents with thirty-seven (75.5%) recorded;
- Burglary dwelling, forty incidents with thirty-six (90%) recorded;
- Burglary non-dwelling, thirty-two incidents with thirty-two (100%) recorded;
- Criminal damage, twenty-eight incidents with eleven (39.3%) recorded;
- Criminal damage to a dwelling, twenty-two incidents with twenty (90.1%) recorded; and
- Criminal damage to a vehicle, twenty-eight incidents with twenty-six (92.9%) recorded.
Further triangulation of the data was undertaken to ascertain whether incidents that were attended and those that were dealt over the telephone had any bearing on the recording rates. Where the crime involved ‘offences against the person’ and had been dealt with over the telephone (n = 24), only one had been recorded as a crime. A quarter of those not recorded had comments on the incident log to suggest that ‘no complaint’ had been made. Nine of the incidents related to the category ABH/common assault, six related to minor public order and five related to threats to commit damage.

Forty six point four per cent of ‘offences against property’ (n = 332) had been dealt with over the telephone (n = 154) and 139 (90.3%) of these had been recorded as crime. Significantly, most of the ‘offences against property’ incidents dealt with over the telephone are attended to by crime desk personnel; as a consequence the details of the incident as described by the victim are taken at face value by the operator and this recording methodology would be described as almost a purely ‘prima facie’ approach (see Burrows et al 2000).

Triangulation of the data shows that most ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims relate to ‘offences against property’ (70.3%) and where this is so, if the crime is dealt with by way of telephone, typically by crime desk personnel, the crime is more likely to be recorded. The exception to this is incidents involving burglary dwelling crimes, where attendance at the scene was mandatory in all three of forces and recording rates were high. Conversely, ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims relating to ‘crimes against the person’ (28.3%) were far less likely to be recorded.

Those incidents that were dealt over the telephone were invariably dealt with by control room operators who appear to have made up their minds that an offence had not been committed, or as previously discussed, had been unable to resource the incident in the first place. Notably, fifty-five (11.7%) of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims, indicated within the log that no complaint had been made by the victim although
of these, six were still recorded as crimes. Forty-three of these ‘alleged’ crime incidents related to ‘crimes against the person’.

Only twenty-one of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents reported by personal victims had any indication within the log that there was, in the opinion of the police member of staff dealing with the incident, no offence actually committed. In some cases a ‘non-crime report’ was submitted. Non-crime reports are used within one force as a means of capturing data for future reference or intelligence purposes and were particularly relevant where cases involved domestic disputes or harassment type incidents where a notifiable offence had not been committed. It is interesting to note that where officers had stated that no crime had been committed, the incident log also noted, in five cases, that ‘no complaint’ had been made. This suggests that the decision to not record a crime was based on whether a victim wished to pursue the matter or not rather than on policy and legal criteria regarding whether a crime had been committed. However, most (65%) of ‘alleged’ crime incidents that are not recorded as a crime tend to be closed as either ‘advice given’ or ‘enquiries completed’ or ‘no further action’ or ‘for information only’.

Further triangulation of data was undertaken to examine ‘alleged’ crime incidents where the victim was apparently a juvenile\textsuperscript{21}. A juvenile was for the purposes of this research taken as a person under the age of seventeen. This is the age under which an appropriate adult is required in order to interview a person, whether that is as a witness or as an offender. Whilst a crime complaint can be made by a person of any age, an appropriate adult is required where a statement is to be made. Of the 850 ‘alleged’ crime incidents, fifty-two (6.1%) related to victims under the age of seventeen of which twenty-

\textsuperscript{21} Only ‘alleged crime incidents’ where it was readily apparent from the contents of incident log that the victim was under the age of 17 were taken into account. The limitations are that the population relating to juveniles is reliant on the capture of this data in the incident log; consequently there may be considerably more victims who fit this criterion than that stated.
one (59.6%) were recorded as a crime. Six of the incidents were dealt with over the telephone, of those; fifty per cent were recorded as crimes. Fourteen of the fifty-two incidents were reported by the victim and fifty per cent recorded as crimes. Thirty-one incidents were reported by a friend or relative, of which eighteen (58%) were recorded. Seven incidents were reported by a third party (two being a police officer), of which six were recorded.

Of the fifty-two incidents that involved juvenile victims, forty-seven (90.1%) related to 'offences against the person', twenty-seven (57.4%) of which were recorded as crimes. This is compared to 168 incidents relating to adults, of which only sixty-six (39.3%) were recorded as crimes. Thirty of the incidents involving juveniles related specifically to the category ABH/common assault, of which sixteen (53.3%) were recorded as crimes. By comparison, fifty-one (56%) out of ninety-one incidents involving adults, where the incident specifically related to ABH/common assault, were recorded as crimes. The ratio of more serious crimes against the person appeared to be higher amongst juveniles, 1:7.8 (six out of forty seven), than it did amongst the adult population, 1:28 (six out of 168). However, some caution should be attached to these results, as it is not clear from the data that all offences against juveniles have been captured.

Of the 850 'alleged' crime incidents, six incident logs specifically noted that the informant was intoxicated and none of these were recorded as crimes. An officer attended all six, five of which were reported by the victim. Four of these related to offences of ABH/common assault with the other two relating to offences of criminal damage. Of the 193 incidents involving commercial or corporate victims, 167 (86.5%) were recorded as crimes. In the case of three of these incidents, all reported by the victim, the incident logs indicated that a crime report had been completed but no crime record could be traced.

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22 See footnote 21 p. 181.
The fact that a crime report was not traced may simply have been as a result of human or process error. Of those that did not result in a recorded crime, the logs indicated that four of these were reported by the victim and that 'no complaint' had been made.

**Conclusions**

Overall the examination of the incident logs presented a complex picture of how incidents are dealt with and the subsequent outcomes of those incidents. The distilling of incidents into those that eventually become ‘alleged’ crime incidents is dependent on the information provided within the incident logs and is therefore not entirely objective. An understanding of the law and the Home Office Counting Rules is of paramount importance and even then an entirely accurate picture is unlikely to be achieved. What becomes clear is that there are a number of phenomena at play that effect the production of the finalised incident log and a significant dependency is placed upon police officers and staff to ‘get it right’.

The methodologies employed in the previous research (Burrows et al, 2000; Farrington and Dowds 1985; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b) and that employed during this research has produced differing results around crime recording rates. Whether a ‘prima facie’, ‘evidential’ (Burrows et al, 2000) or a ‘balance of probabilities’ model is used, two of the key issues are the interpretation of the content of the logs and the lack of descriptive detail within the text on which to base that interpretation. Clearly, some logs were self explanatory, such as those that referred to ‘definite’ allegations of crime such as burglary or theft from shop, but those that were ‘possible’ allegations (Farrington and Dowds 1985) were far more difficult to discern and left a wide margin for error.

A number of these latter allegations were dependant on further investigation by attendant officers and this action was all too often lacking or if it had been carried out the seriousness of the event was minimised to either allow for the recording of a different
crime category or no crime at all. Where incidents were reported by third parties, that is, those that were not involved in any way, the incident was invariably of the ‘possible’ allegation type and as a consequence a very low recording rate was observed. Differing recording rates were also observed by crime type and by victim type. Incidents were sometimes closed without an officer attending and the explanation for this was often unclear from the text of the incident logs, leading to assumptions that perhaps, as far as the control room operators were concerned, the problem had simply gone away.
Chapter 11  Data analysis: Focus groups

This approach involved conducting a written exercise and group discussions with detective and uniform officers in forces B and C. The research replicated the work conducted by HMIC during the thematic inspection into forces’ crime recording procedures and used the same scenarios based on real incidents (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000b).

Split into two groups in each force, the participants were individually given a written exercise containing hypothetical crime scenarios (Appendix F) in which they were asked whether they would record a crime or not, the crime type and reason behind their decision. Prior to commencement of the exercise they were informed that there were ‘no right or wrong’ answers. Following the written exercises, informal discussions took place to expand on and explore crime recording issues and the decisions made during the written exercise. The main points during the discussions were noted and expanded upon in note form at the conclusion.

In total there were seventeen participants across the two forces, in force, B participants consisted of three patrol officers and four detective officers whereas in force C there were six patrol officers and four detectives. There were nine separate scenarios, three of which were developed further by way of additional information on new pages, thus adding a further seven scenarios in total. A brief synopsis of the answers to the scenarios as provided by the participants is reproduced in Table B7.
Of the 272 scenarios, 270 were answered and of these, respondents indicated they would record 178 crimes (65.9%) in total. Of the 270 scenarios, thirteen were left unanswered by respondents regarding the reasons why they would or would not record a crime in the circumstances given.

Analysis of the data revealed that where officers would record a crime the predominant reason given (48.3%) was that there was an ‘allegation being made by the victim’. The other significant reason for recording crimes was based on the fact that there was ‘evidence of a crime’ (25.3%). The fact that recording a crime was a matter of ‘force policy’ also featured in a number of cases (9.6%). However, in most cases, the scenario scripts provided not only an allegation from the victim but a description of some form of physical evidence that was hypothetically available to the officer.

‘Lack of evidence of a crime’ accounted for 46.7 per cent of the reasons for not recording a crime within the scenarios given, with a further 19.6 per cent unrecorded due to the fact that the victim was not willing to make a complaint. A further 17.4 per cent stated they would only record a crime if the victim reported the offence and thirteen per cent stated they would not record a crime owing to the fact that the victim could not be traced. Only two participants stated that they doubted the validity of the complaint.

Of the scenarios given, five related to ‘offences against the person’, of which three related to the same incident, and the rest related to ‘offences against property’ such as theft and criminal damage. It is worthwhile examining each scenario in turn as each represented a number of challenges for the participants ranging from information provided by the victim.

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23 Approximately a year prior to the research within force B the force had been subject of a scathing report by HMIC regarding its crime recording practices. The force, as a consequence, implemented an ‘ethical’ crime recording policy, led by the then ACC. A number of staff referred to the need to adhere to ‘ethical’ crime recording.
through to physical evidence of an offence. The participants were also required to
determine what offence if any they would record based on the information they were
given.

**Scenarios 1 and 10**

Scenario 1 involved a report from the victim and related to a window cracked at her home
address whilst she was away from the property. There is no information regarding how
the window came to be damaged but of more notable significance was the fact that she
was reporting the matter in order to obtain a crime number required to facilitate repair by
the council. Implicit in the scenario was the necessity to obtain this crime number without
which the repairs would not be carried out at the council's expense.

A number of participants indicated that this offence was not one that would normally be
dealt with by patrol officers unless there was some indication that an attempted burglary
had occurred. In the main, the offence would be dealt with by a crime desk where a
decision to record a crime would almost always be taken. Almost half of the officers
stated they would record a criminal damage under the circumstances and were happy to
accept the allegation made by the victim as a crime. One officer stated they would record
the crime ‘because of the pressure on me to do so under ethical recording’. Of those that
would not record the report as a crime, all stated that their decision was based on the fact
that there was a lack of evidence to indicate that a crime had occurred. A number of
participants concluded that the lack of information meant that the damage might simply
have been caused accidentally, for example, ‘bird flying into window’ [sic]. As most
officers concluded, further enquiries were needed.

Given the circumstances, it is difficult to see how any conclusion could be reached, whilst
a bird flying into the window may be stretching the imagination, it is not beyond the
realms of possibility. However, it is seemingly just as likely that the window could have
damaged accidentally by children playing football, as it is that an individual deliberately
caused the damage. If the assertion made by officers that a crime would almost certainly
be recorded by the crime desk is correct, there is a danger in these circumstances, and
many like it that crimes would be recorded that had not occurred. Paradoxically
therefore, there is some anecdotal evidence that rather than forces under-recording
crime, in some circumstances they may over record it. As one officer stated ‘[f]urther
enquiries [are required] re weather prevailing at the time or likely object around which
may have caused damage.’

The scenario merely served to highlight the difficulties in the decision making process
and the possibility that owing to processes that are designed to rationalise police
attendance at scenes and make the best use of resources (Audit Commission 1993),
sufficient information is often not garnered to make a rational decision based on all the
circumstances. However, it should also be recognised that the attendance of officers at
scenes will not necessarily produce the information required to make a completely
informed decision.

Scenario 10 involved a report from the victim and related to a small glass panel in the
front door of a house being smashed. There is no information regarding how the panel
came to be damaged but of significance is the fact that this was in a front door and the
scenario states, ‘it does not appear that anyone had entered the premises’. The test in
this case was not only about whether a crime would be recorded, but what type of crime,
that is, was this a case of criminal damage or attempted burglary. Overall fifteen of the

24 The author dealt with such a case early in his service as a police officer. The only tell tale sign of how the
damage was caused to an upstairs smashed bedroom window was a large feather on the bedroom floor and on
closer examination a few small spots of blood on the windowsill. The only logical solution to the cause of the
damage was that a large bird had flown into the window.
seventeen participants indicated that they would record a crime although only two stated they would record an attempted burglary, whereas the rest indicated this was a case of criminal damage. The majority (n = 11) indicated that there was evidence of a crime, ‘because a crime has obviously been committed’ and three indicated there was an allegation made by the victim. One of the participants that indicated they would not record a crime stated, ‘investigate further. Cannot prove a crime at this stage’. The need to investigate further was a dominant feature in all of the answers given by participants.

The overall opinion given by participants, during the follow up discussion session, was that this scenario, in contrast to Scenario 1, provided details by way of evidence that tended to indicate a crime had occurred, vis-à-vis the circumstances did not suggest that this might be accidental damage. What was called into question was the evidence required to ascertain whether this was a crime of criminal damage or attempted burglary. The latter, falling into a crime category upon which performance was measured, was less likely to be recorded as participants felt a need to justify the categorisation. They also felt that any decision to record an attempted burglary would undoubtedly be called into question by the crime management unit staff who would place significant emphasis on the need for substantial evidence. As one officer stated, ‘if the damage was next to a door lock I might be inclined to think again but even then I wouldn’t be thanked for recording it as that [attempted burglary]’.

**Scenario 2**

Scenario 2 involved a report of criminal damage to a hedge by a neighbour. The victim reported the incident for information purposes and did not wished the neighbour seen or the matter pursued. Of the seventeen participants, twelve (70.6%) indicated they would record a crime and ten did so simply on the basis that an allegation had been made by the victim. One participant indicated there was evidence of an offence and one indicated that they would record the crime due to force policy. As one participant commented, referring to their current force policy, ‘the fact that you have undetected crime doesn’t
matter anymore’; however, another within the same group questioned, ‘how many duff crimes have been reported?’ Where a crime had been recorded there were a number of solutions as to how the matter would be progressed within the crime management system. One participant suggested that the crime report would be filed undetected, another suggested, ‘attach appropriate forms to screen out as ‘no crime’ and another suggested, ‘write off as CD to P [complainant declines to prosecute]’. The latter two solutions would result in a crime either being recorded but not counted as a statistic or a crime being detected. The implications of the former solution are that no crime did actually occur and in the latter solution a person would appear on the police crime database as being responsible for a crime without their knowledge and without having been seen.

This latter solution was a theme repeated in other groups of participants. Another participant from a different group suggested that they would ignore the wishes of the victim and would speak to the neighbour, the rationale being that ‘if I submit a crime report it would require the offender to be spoken to, to detect the crime’. This officer went on to explain the difficulties in his own force where there was an expectation that a crime would be detected where the offender was known regardless of the circumstances of the case. Where officers had decided not to record a crime the reason given was simply that the victim did not wish to pursue the matter.

**Scenario 3**

This scenario involved the discovery of graffiti by an officer on patrol. Given this scenario, officers were less inclined to record a crime and in fact only six indicted they would record a crime of criminal damage, based on the fact that there was evidence of a crime. The circumstances provided within the scenario in fact indicated that there might be two crimes to be recorded under the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 1998c) as there were possibly two different owners of property and therefore two different victims. Only one participant recognised this fact but indicated they would not record a
crime, ‘B.T. do not record such things as far as I know. Depending on the wall who it belongs to etc. would depend … further enquiries’.

Where participants had decided not to record a crime, ten (58.8%) stated they would only do so if reported by the victim and one indicated there was no evidence of a crime. As one officer stated, ‘working on an area such as …. We would be spending all our time recording these things to no ones gain’.

During subsequent discussions participants in each group described the impracticalities of recording such incidents as crime. Even those that had indicated in their written answer to the scenario that they would record a crime generally reached a consensus that in reality they would not. As one officer put it, ‘graffiti is an everyday occurrence; to some people it’s an occupation. I had one kid, he’d done that many I couldn’t find them all and he couldn’t remember every one of them’. When probed he continued, ‘of course when you catch them its great, loads of detected crime’.

**Scenarios 4 and 5**

Scenario 4 involved an all too common occurrence of a seemingly abandoned vehicle that had been damaged and stripped and the owner was not known, whilst Scenario 5 built on this, adding that the owner had been traced and spoken to and that evidence of further theft from the vehicle had occurred. The two scenarios indicated that there were two possible crimes of theft that had been committed. Whilst it may not have been possible to determine whether a crime had occurred given the circumstances of the first scenario, it would have been incumbent on officers to record two crimes in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 1998c) when the circumstances became clearer in the second scenario; however, few participants recognised this fact. Only one participant indicated that they would record a crime given the circumstances of the first scenario, with most indicating that there was a lack of evidence of a crime and justifying this by stating that it ‘may have been legitimate damage caused by [the] owner
(i.e. lost keys)’ or that the victim could not be traced. A number of participants indicated they would treat the vehicle as having been abandoned and would commence procedures to deal with the matter as such, in order for the vehicle to be removed by the council. Once the circumstances had changed (Scenario 5) and the owner became known, the majority (n = 15) indicated they would record a crime. However, two participants only indicated they would do so if reported by the victim, as one officer put it, ‘how do I know its [sic] not just another insurance scam?’

**Scenarios 6, 7 and 8**

Scenario 6 involved a report, by a third party, of a fight and this is developed further in Scenarios 7 and 8 through the provision of further information and evidence. One participant did not answer Scenario 6 and of those that did, only two indicted they would record the incident as a crime (assault) based on the information provided by a witness. In general participants declined to record the incident described in Scenario 6 as a crime on the basis that there was a lack of evidence (n = 6) or that the victim could not be traced or the crime had not been reported by them (n = 7). One participant indicated they doubted the veracity of the information provided by the informant.

One participant in supporting that there was a lack of evidence stated ‘not without further information – no evidence to suggest any more than common assault which any IP [injured party] is entitled to consent to – all combatants willing to fight’. This seemingly bizarre explanation highlights a lack of knowledge of the law and a willingness to make assumptions regarding the given circumstances. The contradiction in the use of terminology is equally confusing; an injured party would not be such if they were willing participants. Another participant indicated, ‘There are no injured parties. They may have been fooling around. No injury etc’. Whilst Scenario 6 is lacking in detail it is an all too

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25 IP or injured party is a police term used to describe the victim of a crime as opposed to describing the fact that the person is injured.
common example of reports received by the police. The scenario indicates that a crime may have occurred such as an assault or a public order offence, but without further detail it would be difficult to determine which crime, if any, should be recorded.

When presented with the further information within Scenario 7 where the injured person is found but declines to make a complaint, ten participants stated they would record an assault based on an allegation made by the victim (n = 6) or the evidence of a crime (n = 4). The participant who indicated an injured party could consent to a common assault and would not have recorded a crime in Scenario 6 now stated, ‘Evidence now says more than common assault has taken place – IP cannot consent’, thus the incident would now be recorded as an assault. A number of the participants indicated that there was an allegation coupled with evidence of a crime and this appeared to be a determining factor. Likewise, a number progressed the recording of crime to that of detection and stated that this should be cleared up as ‘Complainant declines to Prosecute’. However, six participants stated they would not record the incident as a crime owing to the fact that the victim did not wish to pursue the matter and one participant doubted the reliability of the information from the victim. One of the participants indicated the victim should be seen when sober to determine whether a complaint was forthcoming. The scenario actually described two assaults but only one participant recognised this fact.

The last scenario, Scenario 8, simply added the fact that the whole incident had been captured on closed circuit television (CCTV). One participant did not answer this question. Of those that did, eleven indicated they would record the crime as either assault or public order and in some cases both. The participant that had previously doubted the information made the decision to now record the incident as a public order offence. The latter additional information in Scenario 8 seemed to merely reinforce decisions already made but also opened up opportunities to explore the recording of public order offences.
Scenario 9

This scenario involved an allegation of an injury caused during a domestic dispute but the victim did not wish to pursue a complaint. Fifteen of the participants indicated they would record a crime with the predominant reason being given that it was force policy (n = 9). One reason provided was ‘because she has been assaulted and under new guidelines I would feel under pressure to deal with it as an assault’. A number of participants mentioned the need for positive action and as a consequence, many noted the need to arrest the offender. Only one participant indicted that they would not record the crime because the victim declined to make a complaint and one stated that there was no evidence of an offence. Not surprisingly, this officer was the same that stated in previous answers that a person can consent to common assault and thus provided the reasoning behind their answer as, ‘No clear offence committed – may be accidental/ defence /lies – she can consent to common assault’.

Scenario 11

This scenario provided an example of a report from a store detective regarding the allegation of a theft from a shop. The circumstances are by no means clear but tend to suggest a crime has been committed. Eleven (64.7%) of the seventeen participants indicated they would record the incident as a crime with ten of them doing so on the information provided by the witness. ‘Because the offender ran off, there would appear to be an offence’ and ‘information would suggest bottles have been stolen’ were put forward as reasons for recording a crime. The remaining six participants stated they would not record a crime because there was not the evidence available with one participant stating, ‘no way of proving a theft occurred’ and another providing a different insight, ‘store detectives wouldn’t even call the police in [location]'.
Scenario 12

The scenario involved an allegation of an offence of rape where the victim did not wish to make a complaint. Only three of the participants indicated that they would not record the allegation, with two stating there was no complaint from the victim and one stating there was insufficient evidence. The overriding factor in determining that an offence would be recorded was the belief that this was a serious offence and as such should be recorded and investigated. This belief, in contrast to similar scenarios where there was a paucity of evidence and a wish by the victim not to make a complaint, led participants to overlook these facts in favour of recording, although as one officer stated ‘protect your back’ and another indicated the report could be ‘no crimed’ after recording.

Scenarios 13–16

These scenarios involved a drive off from a filling station where petrol had not been paid for. Once again an all too common occurrence reported to the police. Sixteen of the seventeen participants answered the question and indicated they would record a crime given the circumstances as described in Scenario 13, with three indicating they would record a theft and thirteen indicating they would record an offence of making off without payment. The main reasons given were that there was an allegation made by the victim. However, when provided with further information that indicated the owner of the offending vehicle might be traceable through the vehicle’s registration number (Scenario 14), only eleven participants indicated they would record a crime, with four stating there was a lack of evidence and two did not answer the question. Part of the explanation for this change was brought about by the fact that officers believed that in some cases the act may have been an error on the part of the driver and therefore, armed with the information, they would be able to follow this up as a non-criminal matter.

It became apparent that officers were willingly but often unwittingly acting as debt collecting agents. As participants pointed out, ‘if you can’t prove that they intended to drive off without paying and more often than not you can’t, the best you can hope for is a
quick trip back to the garage to pay for the petrol they had’. Perversely though, a number of the officers switched the offence type they would record from making off without payment to theft. The explanation for this lay in the fact that once a person has arrived at their destination they would no longer be ‘making off’ and therefore there was no power of arrest, whereas there was a power of arrest for theft regardless of the circumstances.

Despite the position given in Scenario 15 where the officer had gone off duty prior to tracing the owner of the vehicle, officers were still predominately of the opinion that a crime would be recorded. A change of recording practice was evident when given the information in Scenario 16 that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) no longer held details of the keeper of the vehicle, two of those participants that had changed from recording to not recording, reinstated their decision to record the allegation as a crime and three participants failed to answer the question. Notably though, the respondents had switched from recording theft, back to recording making off without payment.

**Conclusions**

Notably most officers downgraded the seriousness of crimes, for example, where a damaged window in a door indicated the possibility of an attempted burglary, criminal damage was recorded on the basis that evidence did not support the more serious offence. However there were exceptions, few officers failed to record domestic violence crimes, owing to a clear national stance and guidelines being given in forces. Most officers, presented with a rape allegation, recorded the offence, simply because it was perceived to be too serious to ignore or get wrong.

Further discussion with officers revealed that stereotyping of victims and neighbourhoods was common, together with preconceived ideas of specific situations and the notion that victims have ulterior motives for reporting incidents as a crime. This stereotyping, resultant of selective experiences, may explain the differences between answers given
for certain similar scenarios. Some officers asserted that occupiers in social housing often make false allegations of criminal activity in order to initiate repairs to property and avoid costs. Similar assertions extended to mobile phone owners, purporting to report lost phones as stolen, in order to get a replacement through an insurance claim. Officers were able to circumvent the need to create a crime record by providing the victim with an incident number instead of a crime number and this apparently satisfied all concerned, including the organisations purportedly requiring a reference number.

Officers referred to volumes of work and managing of workloads as another factor in determining whether they would record a crime. Hence the recording of graffiti as a crime was seen as unrealistic, as was the recording of volumes of credit card or cheque deceptions unless those offences could be easily detected. It was apparent that officers often did not understand the Home Office Counting Rules and were unsure what crime had been committed. In some cases there was a distinct lack of knowledge of the law. Officers felt under pressure, as they considered that the units they worked in were under resourced but they also felt the need to ‘cover their backs’ by recording incidents as crime when in fact they did not believe a crime had occurred.

Views from officers and staff confirmed findings from previous research (see Burrows and Tarling 1987; Burrows et al 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000) in that approaches to crime recording were dependant on a number of factors, such as the seriousness of the of the alleged crime, the cooperation of the victim, the officer’s view of the victim, situational factors and knowledge of law and procedure. What also became clear was the rationalisation of work to manage various, at times seen as needless, bureaucratic demands. Whilst a number of officers and staff suggested they had a good knowledge of laws and procedures, this was often at odds with the general findings of the research. Although the need for accurate recorded crime figures was often espoused, paradoxically, there was a failure to record events as crimes even though it was recognised that a crime had occurred.
Chapter 12 Data analysis: Police officer and staff surveys

In addition to the incident logs used for the tracking exercise in the three forces (see Chapter 10), a further set of one thousand consecutive general incident logs was drawn from the ‘command and control system’ in force A. Using the same criteria and methodology as described in the incident to crime record tracking exercise, the incidents were analysed and refined to provide a population of ‘alleged’ crime incidents that had not resulted in a recorded crime. These incidents were then amalgamated with the first set of ‘alleged’ crime incidents drawn from force A, where the incident did not result in a recorded crime, in order to provide a dataset from which a random sample of officers and staff that had dealt with the incidents could be identified, that is, those that were the ‘officer in the case’ (OIC).

As was noted in the previous tracking exercise, there were some cases where it was apparent that the incident had been dealt with by a member of the call handling centre (CHC) despite the incident having been graded as one requiring a response. The identified officers and staff were then sent a two-part questionnaire (Appendix E), together with a printed copy of the incident log. This provided participants with the information required to link specific questions to a real event that they had dealt with.

The first part of the questionnaire was incident specific, that is, the questions related to the incident that the officer or member of staff had dealt with. The second part consisted of questions relating to general crime recording issues. In addition a number of questionnaires were sent to officers and staff within the same work groups as those participants that had been sent the incident specific questionnaires; however, these latter
questionnaires only related to general crime recording issues. In all, 262 questionnaires were sent to patrol officers, control room operators and crime desk staff. Ninety-seven of these were incident specific and included the general questions regarding the recording of crime; of these incident specific questionnaires, forty-six (48%) were returned.

The incident specific questionnaires related to 100 incident logs of which three matched incidents already selected. Therefore in the case of three ‘alleged’ crime incidents, there were two incident logs sent to each of the officers or staff. Of the 165 general questionnaires that solely related to questions regarding the recording of crime, sixty-one (37%) were returned.

Incident specific questionnaires

Of the forty-six incident specific questionnaires that were returned, one showed that the police officer did not deal with the ‘incident’ and another was not filled in by the member of staff. Of the remaining forty-four, six respondents did not indicate what type of incident they had dealt with and did not complete the rest of the questionnaire relating to the incident. One respondent indicated that they had recorded the incident as a crime; this was verified and then also excluded from the count. The remaining thirty-seven responses were analysed to ascertain what type of incident the respondents felt they had dealt with, who had reported the incident and whether they, the respondent, believed a crime had been committed. The results from this are produced in Table 3.

Twenty-two of the thirty-seven respondents believed that a crime had occurred and one indicated both yes and no to the question. This belief, regarding the occurrence of a crime, appeared to be based on a range of factors such as, the allegation was made by the victim (n = 8), the allegation was made by the victim and there was evidence of a crime (n = 3), there was evidence of a crime (n = 4), and there was an allegation made by a witness (n = 5). Three respondents did not indicate why they believed a crime had
occurred. Seven of the incidents were reported by victims, five of which related to ‘offences against the person’.

Table 3 Officers’ responses to whether a crime had occurred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident type</th>
<th>Reported by</th>
<th>Believed to be a crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public order</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour dispute</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal damage/arson</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party not involved</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite believing that a crime had occurred, the respondents had not recorded a crime, but thirteen of the twenty-three that believed a crime had occurred, considered recording the incident as a crime and of these, six related to incidents where the allegation had been made by the victim and two related to incidents where witness had made the allegation. The remaining respondent had not indicated why it was felt that a crime had occurred but nonetheless had indicated a belief that this was the case and had considered recording the incident as a crime.

The thirteen respondents were also asked why they considered recording the incident as a crime. Two respondents did not answer the question therefore, of the eleven remaining respondents, five stated they did so on the basis that the victim had reported the incident; however, in one instance the victim withdrew their complaint whilst talking to the officer. Three respondents replied that their consideration was based on the fact that a family
member had reported the incident and in one case the parents/guardian had been given advice. One respondent stated that they had considered recording the offence as a crime because they had been unable to trace the victim. In this case, as the incident related to an assault, it would appear that the officer may have considered it prudent to record the incident as a crime in case the matter was to escalate; however, for no apparent reason such considerations were not seen through. In a further two cases the respondents stated that they felt there was evidence of an offence.

The respondents were asked why they had not recorded the incident as a crime. All thirteen respondents that had considered recording the incident as a crime provided reasons why they did not then record the crime. Six stated that the victim did not wish to make a complaint or to support any police action. Three stated they had been unable to trace the victim and therefore presumably felt they could not verify that a crime had occurred. One stated that there was a lack of evidence and they doubted the veracity of the complaint that incidentally had been reported by a witness and involved an allegation of harassment. One respondent stated that the allegation of harassment was complicated and had advised the victim to attend the police station and another respondent had indicated that a member of a specialist department had taken the crime report. Finally, one respondent stated that there was a lack of evidence regarding an allegation of criminal damage made by a witness.

Analysis of the remaining ten responses where the respondents believed a crime had occurred but did not consider recording this as a crime, revealed that the consideration of the incident being a crime was based on a belief that there was evidence of an offence (n = 2), of which one also stated that the allegation had been made by the victim, a further three stated the allegation had been made by the victim, three considered that fact that the allegation had been made by a witness and two had not given a reason why they believed the incident to be a crime.
The ten respondents were also asked why they had not considered recording the incident as a crime. Amongst the reasons stated by the respondents were, that the incident was reported by a family member and not the victim, the victim withdrew the complaint prior to police arrival, the victim withdrew the complaint whilst speaking to the officer, the victim was unfit to report the crime and would be seen by an officer later, the officer doubted the veracity of the complaint (in this case the incident related to a theft reported by the victim) and they were unable to trace the victim couple with a lack of evidence. Asked why a crime had not been recorded, reasons given were victim does not support or want any police action, the victim was given advice, there was a lack of evidence, the victim was unfit to make the report and needed to be seen by a police officer later and the officer was unable to trace the victim.

As illustrated in Table 3, fourteen of the thirty-seven respondents believed that a crime had not occurred. This belief appeared to be based on a range of factors such as, there was no evidence of a crime (n = 12), two of which were deemed to be civil disputes and one indicated the victim could not be traced. A further response indicated that veracity of the complaint was in doubt, and another that the victim could not be traced. The responses also indicated that the victims reported six of the incidents, five were reported by independent third parties and three were reported by a witness.

Within the thirty-seven valid returned questionnaires that related to incidents, the predominant reasons given for not recording a crime was that there was: a lack of evidence (24%); no offences present (22%); the victim does not want or support police action (22%) and the victim could not be traced (14%).

**General questionnaires**

Within the 107 returned general questionnaires, seventy-three (68%) related to patrol officers, thirty (28%) related to control room staff and four (4%) related to crime desk staff. Of the 102 respondents who answered the question about whether they had difficulty in
deciding whether a crime had been committed when attending or dealing with an incident, twenty-two (22%) stated that this was the case. Fifteen of these were patrol officers, five were control room staff and two were crime desk staff. Notably ten of the fifteen patrol officers that stated they had difficulty in making the decision were respondents in the incident specific survey. The difficulties experienced across all the respondents included, deciding whether the matter involved a civil dispute or debt, doubting the veracity of the complaint, the fact that the information or evidence provided was very often not clear, a lack of professional knowledge and that guidelines were unclear or appeared to conflict with common sense.

Those that did not find difficulty in deciding whether a crime had been committed (n = 80) stated that the reasons for this were, that they would record a complaint if made by the victim, there were clear guidelines as to what was a crime, they had the professional knowledge (n = 25) to make this decision and they would record a crime if there was evidence of an offence. It was notable that forty-three of the eighty respondents did not provide a reason.

The respondents were asked whether they experienced any difficulties when recording an incident as a crime or as a particular type of crime. Of the 101 respondents that answered the question, twenty (20%) stated that had experienced difficulties. These difficulties included; the information or evidence provided was very often not clear, they lacked professional knowledge, the force policy lacked flexibility and there was little officer discretion, and there was a lack of resources available. Forty-one respondents stated that their decision to record a crime was influenced by a combination of factors such as the wishes of the victim, professional knowledge, the evidence or information available, policy and the type of offence.

Of the 107 questionnaires returned, 102 respondents answered the question regarding the importance of accurate recorded crime figures. Ninety-four (88%) respondents stated
the accuracy of crime recording was either important or very important, seven stated that it was neither important nor unimportant and one stated that it was very unimportant. Of those that stated that it was important or very important, forty-three (46%) felt that it provided a picture of crime. Twenty-six respondents felt that the accuracy was important as this impacted upon resource management and nineteen felt that the accuracy of crime recording aided the investigation. Twenty of the respondents did not state why they felt accuracy of crime figures was important.

The twenty-three responses relating to specific incidents where the respondent believed that the incident was a crime were matched against the responses provided by the same respondent in respect of the accuracy of recorded crime. Nineteen of these stated that the accuracy of recorded crime was either important or very important. All fourteen respondents that did not think the incident they dealt with was a crime stated that the accuracy of recorded crime was either important or very important.

Participants were asked whether all crimes that come to the notice of the police should be recorded. Of the 102 responses received, sixty-two (60%) stated they should and thirty-eight (37%) stated they should not. Three participants (3%) answered both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to the question. The responses were further analysed to ascertain the reasons given behind the answers. Of the sixty-two that stated all crime should be recorded, fourteen did not give a reason for their answer. Twenty-six respondents stated that the recording of crime provided a picture of crime trends. Nine respondents stated that resources were an issue and that recording crime would assist in determining the resources required.

A number of the responses indicated that there was some difficulty in determining which incidents were crimes and which were civil disputes. The responses were cross-matched to those officers and staff that had dealt with incidents and believed that a crime had occurred. Eight of the twenty-two respondents that had dealt with incidents and believed the incident to be a crime also felt that all crime should be recorded. Three felt this
provided a better picture of crime trends; two though qualified their response by stating that some offences should be civil disputes or were not serious enough to be recorded as crimes. Answers also included justification for resources and the fact that recording crime was part of a police officer’s role.

Thirty-four officers and staff responded to the request for additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. These comments were analysed and grouped into themes. A number of the comments made indicated an issue regarding the bureaucracy involved in the recording of crime. An officer summed this up by stating ‘There is too much duplication of forms when recording crime’. Other officers were far more vociferous in their feelings: ‘Employ robots to do form filling and paperwork, time consuming and repetitive waste of time’. Another officer made the link between the bureaucracy of form filling and its effect on officers by simply stating ‘less forms = more enthusiasm’. A solution put forward by another was ‘… an updated crime recording system which eliminates having to record everything 3 or 4 times on the same piece of paper’. The effects of the bureaucracy incorporating the issue around paperwork has been on the central government agenda for a number of years and was raised in research conducted in 2001 (PA Consulting Group 2001) and in subsequent government reports (Home Office 2002c; Flanagan 2007).

Not surprisingly, other staff recognised that the setting of targets and the politics at play impinged on their ability to do their job: ‘I can see why recording is important but do get dismayed when the goalposts change to suit the counting of figures for political reasons. It doesn’t fool the public and section officers get the brunt all the time’. Whereas some officers blamed their own management: ‘senior management appear obsessed with the easy detected. They need a reality fix, a look at the greater picture’; ‘Senior Officers are so ‘up tight’ about figures and procedure that they have no idea of pressures on [constables] on the street. Crime reports being returned for no hoper crimes where a box has not been ticked’; ‘We spend too much time & energy trying to prove that we are doing
something - instead of actually doing it! People don't want detected crime - they don't want it to happen in the first place’, others blamed central government: ‘Get on to the Home Office and tell them not to put too much pressure on us number crunching and spend more time giving a quality service rather than quality paperwork reviews’. The comments from officers would attract some sympathy from previous commentators such as Leishman and Savage (1993) and Reiner (1994) who are clear that the setting of targets merely serves to detract officers from what the public call on them to do.

Other officers were of the opinion that there was too much time and effort wasted on investigating minor crimes or on crimes that were somehow linked to corporate bodies that appeared unwilling to put in place mechanisms to prevent crimes in the first place: ‘Officers are spending much too much time investigating crime that the officer knows is not going anywhere. There is too much pressure on officers to the effect that officers are now trying to get rid of crime reports instead of investigating [them]; ‘... people are 'scared' to commit to paper because it is difficult to get rid of that is, domestic ABH, offender has already left the scene and IP doesn't wish to make a complaint. The crime report submitted would be sent back for the offender to be spoken to which isn't practical'; ‘Some crimes that are recorded have no scope for investigation or prosecution and yet valuable time is spent doing so'; 'The police waste time and money on minor crimes. The police do not target areas or criminals effectively and most of our time is spent recording and not detecting. We are therefore not financially making the best use of our resources'; ‘We should not record drive offs as they are self-inflicted by petrol companies. If they make no effort to have pre-pay pumps - why should it be recorded?’ ‘We shouldn't investigate all crime that is Drive offs and banking offences’.

Perhaps the most telling of comments and one that demonstrated the frustration of officers on the street was provided by one officer: ‘Perhaps if we were sensible about what we recorded we might stem the rise of our crime rate instead of making work for ourselves by clogging our crime recording system with the consistent shit that is not worth
investigating’. Of course it is difficult to gauge just what this, or any other officer, may consider a crime worthy of recording and investigation.

Some officers simply pointed to the operational difficulties of delivering a service and the reality of dealing with members of society who, although victims, did not necessarily wish the police to be involved: ‘Sometimes difficult to record crimes when I/P not willing to give details or correct details. Difficult when I/P anti police’; ‘The attached incident is a good example of drink and the problems we face even with victims. I nearly walked away at the hospital due to the lack of help and abuse by the victim’; ‘Some people tell operators different to the real facts to gain a reaction. When entering a situation you ask yourself is there a crime, is there a complaint?’

Officers also noted that resource issues presented difficulties in delivering a service: ‘Its disheartening listening to people who have suffered a crime, knowing that we are not going to do anything about it for staffing reasons etc’; ‘It is better to have officers available to prevent crimes in the first place rather than just recording and filing with no action taken on them’; ‘A lot more crime reports should be taken over the telephone by crime desk. No manpower to police effectively’. To counterbalance the latter comment, one officer stated, ‘On many occasions reports are taken via the telephone and an officer does not attend the scene. I have come across a number of incidents where there was definite scope for SOCO26. That may have led to a detection rather than just another recorded crime’.

26 The term SOCO refers to Scenes of Crime Officer
Conclusions

Responses to the officer and staff questionnaires clearly indicated that the available evidence, information from victims, their purported availability, and their wishes, or a combination of any of these factors, affected the final outcome of any incident involving a crime. The person reporting the crime and the crime type also had a significant bearing on the outcome. The responses also revealed that officers and other staff had difficulty in making decisions as to whether an incident amounted to a crime by law. A self confessed lack of knowledge of the law and of policies and procedures was further compounded by situational difficulties, for example, a lack of evidence or availability of a victim.

The frustrations of officers in what might be termed their ‘street level reality’ were borne out from the comments added at the end of the questionnaires. The fact that officers and staff felt that victims are not always co-operative, that many crimes are only minor infringements of the law and that they are not only chasing ‘meaningless’ targets but also felt under resourced added to the frustration and no doubt compounded and confused the issues around crime recording.

Of course some comments should be put into context, issues such as those around bureaucracy have been subject of debate by central bodies (Home Office 2002c; Flanagan 2007; Hansard 2007) for some considerable time and have not gone unnoticed in the media. In a Daily Mail article (Drury 2007) Nick Clegg, the Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman was quoted as saying, ‘This government's mania for targets and form filling has turned thousands of police officers into pen-pushers for the state’.

Equally as notable though is the response to the issue around fraud offences, typically involving credit card or cheque fraud. The Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office 2007b) were amended in 2007 to address the issue of recording fraud involving credit institutions by reducing the burden on the police to record these types of crime, this
followed a change in the law regarding fraud offences and some considerable debate since the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard around which institutions, other than the police, collated and were able to suitably report crime statistics back to the Home Office.
Chapter 13 Discussion of findings

Professionalism, managerialism and street level bureaucrats.

There is some debate about whether the act of policing falls within the elements required to qualify for professional status (Neyroud 2003). Policing is not self-regulating and whilst officers have a considerable amount of discretion, they act within a substantial legal framework. Despite ACPO moving towards a more professional status (Charman and Savage 1998; Savage et al, 2000) and the judiciary’s apparent recognition of policing independence27, ‘[s]enior police officers have become increasingly constrained by a national performance framework’ (Jones 2003, pg. 611). New Public Management ideals are seemingly incompatible with this independence and its corollary discretion, leading to the development of ‘a variety of strategies of organisational control’ including budgetary controls and ‘a combination of rigid procedures with the deliberate delegation of areas of discretion’ (Ham and Hill 1993).

There is sufficient persuasive argument amongst a significant number of commentators that the use of performance frameworks through the setting of objectives and performance indicators is damaging to the required flexibility that enables effective policing (Crawford 1998; Leishman and Savage 1993; Loveday 1995, 1999, 2000; Morgan and Newburn 1997; Newburn and Jones 1996; Reiner 1994) and that ‘policing policy decisions must be insulated from political interference and left to the professional judgement of senior police officers’ (Jones 2003, pg. 611).

27 see R v Metropolitan Police Commissioner, ex parte Blackburn ([1968] All E.R. 763)
One of the core issues of professionalism is that of independence from influence of the state or commerce (Downie 1990) and yet as discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 the influence of the state on policing has increased significantly. Through a top down approach to the setting objectives and a rigorous system of audit and inspection, conformity is brought to bear. The previous chapters describe the bureaucratic processes that have evolved to ensure that the police deliver on set objectives to the extent that there is little room for manoeuvre or discretion but rather subjugation to management ideals (McLaughlin and Muncie 1994) where efficiency rather than 'abstract professional standards' (Newman and Clarke 1994, pg. 23) are espoused. This top down approach does not rest with chief officers but pervades the whole of the organisation (Wright 1999) affecting the behaviour of officers on the street charged with the exercise of discretion.

The argument that professional judgment of senior police officers should be paramount in policy decisions rather than being subjugated to central control has considerable validity, but paradoxically, it would seem that government and ACPO are reluctant bedfellows28, each complicit in the crime control myth and each blaming the other when less than favourable results are achieved, but of course taking credit when the opposite is true. This myopic 'crime control' utopia, impinges on the practitioners who deliver street level policing. It fails to take into account the complexity of the social interactions between the police and public, the realities of the social world and the complicated nature of data collection and record keeping. The latter are then managed to mitigate central control, or to expound the virtues of the crime control myth dependant on whether the data is favourable.

28 Reiner (1992a) provides a clear synopsis of the Home Office and ACPO relationship at the beginning of the 1990s, whilst the Home Office have become more regulatory and influential in the running of forces, (see previous chapters) many of the insights provided by Reiner still hold true.
The aim of this thesis has not been to discuss professionalism at the higher managerial levels in policing, although clearly this has an impact as managerialism and professionalism abrashely bump alongside each other, but rather to examine the delivery of policing at an operational level where the inexorable management ideals and finesse of professionalism are pushed aside to make way for a street level reality.

This reality brings with it coping mechanisms, which seek to address an increasing demand for services coupled with the managerial dictum and its corollary bureaucracy. Lipsky (1980) uses the term ‘street level bureaucrats’ to describe those who work in public service agencies and exercise wide discretion, ration services and process those they interact with in a manageable way whilst negotiating targets to appear as if they are being met. To Lipsky these are the policy makers and many of the attributes described by Lipsky are easily recognisable within the description of this research and it is apparent, pervade the lower ranks of the police organisation. The introduction of the NCRS is clearly aimed at negating the wide discretion exercised by these ‘street level bureaucrats’.

As Neyroud (2003, pg. 586) discusses, the elements of policing are not within the strict ‘taxonomic approach’ that enable it to fulfil full professional status; nevertheless, as discussed post, the core activities of policing appear to fall within what may be described as a profession. Morrell (2003) in describing the core values of the medical profession as ‘confidence, confidentiality, competence, contract, community, responsibility and commitment’, could in so doing, be describing the very attributes required of those delivering policing on the front line. In the context of policing, Morrell's values can be transposed as:

**Confidence** - This relates to the confidence of individual members of the public in their police officers in general or in the police officer with whom they are interacting at any one time.
Confidentiality - Confidentiality is the intimate nature of the interactions between individual members of the public and police officers. This is brought about in many ways not just in terms of law-abiding citizens reporting information to the police but those that break the law and provide valuable information on which policing depends.

As Morrell describes:

The development of team work raises issues of confidentiality between team members and the development of corporate confidentiality as part of the team ethos. It may be threatened by accountability to management and by audit and evaluation ... and the development of electronically recorded and transmitted data. Information may at times be stored in the [police officer’s] mind rather than on records when, for confidentiality, this is in the interest of the individual (p. 3).

Competence - The competence of individual officers is paramount. ‘Methods of continuing education, which may include audit, peer review and reaccreditation may be necessary to ensure high quality [service] and maintain the respect and confidence of the general public (p. 3).’ Morrell advocates that adherence to protocols does not necessarily reflect competence when the needs of individuals is at variance with such protocols. Judgement is a core function that needs to be inculcated at an early stage of training and should be informed by research and be cognisant of moral and philosophical values.

Contract - This describes the unwritten contract between police officers and the individual members of the public and the public at large to provide optimal service within the resources available. The police in general also have contracts with Police Authorities and other bodies. Morrell states that authorities may demand services which have not been proved beneficial by research or which are motivated by economic considerations
and ‘in such circumstances professionals have a responsibility to challenge such demands and, if necessary, refuse to cooperate in such activities’ (p. 4).

Community - Much has been written about community engagement but in this context it is the professional responsibility that is required of police officers to the communities, which they are charged to protect. Here they must ensure as best as possible equitable allocation of resources, managing and reigning in abuses of demand and avoiding allocation in areas that simply satisfy personal gains.

Commitment - Policing is a commitment, a commitment to the public the officers serve, not constrained by strict working hours, which has an inevitable impact on family life, friends and social activities. It is a commitment that sees police officers prepared to put themselves in dangerous situations, sometimes with dire consequences.

Morrell’s description of values hold true for policing as they do for the medical profession and in that sense policing in itself can be described as profession and as with the medical profession and a number of other public services is constrained by management ideals and ‘centralised bureaucratic control’ (p. 4).

At the same time though, the findings of Lipsky (1980) hold true for those delivering a service on the front line. The tensions between the individual officer’s aspirations to professionalism and the organisational and public requirement for officers to display professionalism, is suppressed by the need to produce pleasing statistics and manage service delivery where demand consistently outstrips resources.

Empirical evidence has shown that the only effect of the desire to produce pleasing statistics in order to meet government set targets has been to make forces and officers on the street less effective by virtue of their enforced inflexibility. The centralised control is founded on the fact that modern ‘sound bite’ politics relies upon a simplification of the
social world. Therefore uncritical linkages between police activity and crime rates, increases political reputations and provides comfort and reassurance where perhaps on occasions the fear of crime far exceeds reality. The fact that these political messages are constructed on little more than exercises in creative accounting are as irrelevant as is the notion that the police have little or no control over crime. This managerialist approach degrades the ability of frontline deliverers to exercise professional judgement and the exercise of discretion becomes a coping strategy not in furtherance of Morrell’s values (2003) but to mitigate managerialism and its corollary, bureaucracy.

**How we got to where we are going**

This thesis commenced by describing the top down requirements placed upon the police service within a managerial framework to provide crime data to central bodies. This framework enabled government to ‘manage crime’ and by so doing issued edicts to its agents that will, theoretically at least, control it. Within this framework lies a burgeoning bureaucratic quagmire of rules, regulations and targets that constantly shift in accordance with political imperatives. The nuances of the changes are not always fully understood and yet the effect on the rates of recorded and detected crime can be altered dramatically, often enhancing political standing both at macro and micro levels.

Much of the previous research and descriptions of the way the police record crime (Burrows 1986; Burrows and Tarling 1987; Burrows et al, 2000; Coleman and Moynihan 1996; Farrington and Dowds 1985) proceeds from the assumption that police data collection procedures were inadequate and those collecting the data incompetent, manipulative or both. This suggests a key task was to narrow the gap between the British Crime Survey findings and police statistics and thereby improve the use of the data as a performance measure. However, this premise fails to adequately take into account the inter-personal and situational factors that determine the ways in which notification of a ‘possible’ crime event is, or is not, translated into an official record of a crime. In short, the motivation of the person reporting the crime, the wider social context
in which such a report is made and the motivation of the police officers to whom the report is made tend to, in latter research, be either ignored or negatively presented. What also clearly appears to be missing is the cognition of the complexities in recognising and labelling an event as a crime.

As Young (1981) states, ‘[f]or an action to be termed criminal or deviant demands not one, but two, activities: a group or individual must act in a particular fashion, and, second, another group or individual with different values must label the initial activity as deviant’. Although the adoption of the NCRS is reported to have assisted comparability of police recorded crime statistics across forces (Audit Commission 2007; Home Office 2006b; Statistics Commission 2006) it did so at a significant cost of increased bureaucracy (Hallam 2003).

Service users’ perceptions

One of the key gaps in knowledge about the crime recording process has been that around the interactions between the police and the public. The more recent research into how the police record crimes has concentrated on the data compiled by the police in the form of incident logs and crime records. This data has also been the mainstay of the auditing process conducted by external bodies, such as the Audit Commission and HMIC, to assure data quality. In concentrating on this data, the research either ignores or makes assumptions that events are easily defined and recognised as crimes, that every event that is a crime should be recorded because that is what the victim or the wider public want and that officers or staff involved in the process have a clear knowledge and understanding of the law, rules and associated procedures.

This element of the thesis attempts to bridge the knowledge gap between police recorded data and the very people that precipitated the recording of the data in the first place, members of the public calling the police. Initial analysis of the data concentrated on incident logs where it was apparent that a crime had not been recorded but where a
‘possible’ crime event had occurred. This incident data was grouped into ‘offences against the person’, ‘offences against property’ and several smaller categories including: nuisance youths/nuisance behaviour, complaints, breach of the peace, domestic disputes, and miscellaneous. It was found that, as in previous research (Burrows et al, 2000), in most cases the detail contained within the initial text of the incident log matched the detail given by the person reporting the event. In some cases the incident text did not always reflect the full facts of the event as later described by the caller during interview. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from this owing to a number of factors such as: the caller did not give the operator all of the facts, or the operator has only a limited amount of space within the incident field on the computer to capture the essential details and limited time to complete the task. Nonetheless, these factors add weight to the view that the use of incident data to examine whether an incident amounts to a crime, is of limited value.

Although the initial text within the incident logs reflected what the caller reported, the initial coding given to the incident did not always adequately reflect the information in the text. A prime example was where the incident text stated that the informant had been assaulted by an ex-partner but the initial code simply stated ‘domestic dispute’, rather than assault. On face value the initial code given is correct but appears to have been defined downwards to a less explicit category. An explanation for this might be found in the way that incidents are recorded and managed.

In the force A, the ‘command and control’ system is configured so that incidents appear in a list showing the initial code, followed by one line of the text. A cursory examination of a list by any manager would lead to an interest in certain types of incident but not in others. For example, an assault incident might draw more scrutiny than a domestic incident. Therefore the defining down of an incident in the initial classification might be viewed as a means of avoiding management scrutiny. Similarly, this defining down would also enable officers on the street, that are tasked to the incident, more choice in the way they can
resolve the incident without management scrutiny. However, an alternative view is that an operator is required to make snap decisions about incident classification. In some cases the use of the initial code, particularly those that are more generalised, for example, suspicious, may simply reflect the fact the operator is unsure about the actual incident being reported and also reflects the need to quickly code the incident to enable the allocation of resources.

Fifty-six percent of the incidents examined during this part of the research were reported by the victim and sixteen per cent were reported by a person on behalf of the victim with a third party unconnected to the victim reporting the rest. A notable indication regarding the victims was that thirteen of the fifty were elderly and the majority of the incidents reported by them, or on their behalf, involved harassment or public order type offences. The operator often initially classified these as nuisance youths or nuisance behaviour. In total twenty-four (48%) of the incidents examined involved people that could be described as vulnerable victims, that is, victims that were either elderly, juveniles, from ethnic minority backgrounds or victims of domestic abuse or violence.

In most cases the research revealed that the initial call was, in the view of the victim or caller, dealt with appropriately by the operator and that they received the desired response. However, there were a few calls where the caller was unsure what the police would do as a result of their call, or they felt that their call was not being taken seriously enough. Analysis of the grading of the response required by the operators was generally commensurate with the incident being reported but on some occasions the operators did not appear to grasp the immediacy of the incident. A prime example of this was where an incident was graded as ‘routine’ involved a vulnerable elderly victim and the offenders were still in the area. An incident involving youths throwing eggs at the victim and her house was initially classified as ‘nuisance youths’, and it may be as a consequence of this classification that the initial response was not seen as a priority.
A conclusion of the research was that the more vociferous the caller in demanding action, the more likely they were to receive a prompt response. The consequence of this was that vulnerable victims appeared to be disadvantaged in their ability to access a service, not least because the event type they reported did not appear to be a priority for the operators who appeared to have a clear view of what they considered to be the more important ‘proper’ policing duties.

In some cases where officers had been sent to an incident, there was a clear lack of communication between them and the control room. Callers were not seen and at times had witnessed events and had seen officers arriving and speaking to the offenders, but there was no follow up with the caller to identify the offenders. As a consequence the officers allowed the offenders to go on their way despite the fact that there was often, according to the caller, physical evidence that a crime had been committed.

In twenty-eight per cent of cases where officers had seen the caller or the victim, they had concluded the incident to show that no offences had occurred. In almost all of these cases there was obvious evidence of an offence and yet the officers had clearly misrepresented the facts both to the victim, having told them there was no offence, and to the control room. In some cases the victim or caller was promised some future action but it was quite clear from the incident log that this was unlikely to occur. In a significant number of other cases the officer was non-descript about the final outcome of the event, suggesting that they had carried out an area search or that the incident should be noted for future reference or that no complaint had been made.

In only six cases where the victim was seen was it clear that they did not wish to pursue the matter. In four of these cases the officers did no more than discuss the matter with the victim, at times explaining options available. It was made clear by the victims during interview that they had made up their own minds regarding the course of action they wished to be taken. One victim described how, had he known the implications, he would
not have called the police in the first place. One further case was resolved by the officer through discussion with the offenders and their parents and the victim. In this case the victim was clear that the decision to take no further action was his and that he felt the officer had dealt with the matter very well and brought it to a satisfactory conclusion.

In one case, although the victim, a young boy that had been assaulted had decided to take no further action, it was clear that the attendant officer had significantly influenced this decision. The officer had painted a bleak picture of the subsequent processes and inferred that there were adverse repercussions in the court process, which would be to the detriment of the victim.

Further analysis of the data indicated that although some callers have a clear expectation of some positive action being taken against the offender, such as arrest, a number have a mixed expectation of what the police should do. The overriding identified factor is that the public call on the police to resolve a problem. Invariably they do this out of a sense of duty, where the caller is a witness to an event they believe to be worthy of police attention; out of a sense of desperation, where they have been subjected to behaviours in the past and have now reached a point where they want the police to put a stop to it; where they have a sense of being wronged by virtue of being a victim of a crime; or where they simply want advice as to what to do about a particular event; or a combination of all of these (Ekblom and Heal 1982; Waddington 1993).

In general callers have little understanding of what is a crime and the processes involved in recording it as such. As was demonstrated in one case, the caller thought that contacting the police on one occasion was sufficient for a crime record to be raised when, under the circumstances, in that particular force it was not. Surprisingly, a number of callers expressed an understanding that the police were under pressure regarding resources and couldn’t be everywhere at once, even to the extent that they minimised the incident they were reporting, in comparison to other incidents the police have to deal with.
There was often a begrudged acceptance that the police couldn’t do anything about their particular incident, although at times they were obviously misinformed, and this had a bearing on their outlook. This misinformation, is a result of filtering that occurs at patrol level where ‘extra legal criteria’ are applied by officers to the decision making process in an attempt to avoid ‘unnecessary or unproductive work to forestall complaints about their behaviour and to maintain control of situations’ (Skogan 1976).

Service users’ experience and satisfaction

One of the key questions for this thesis was whether a deviation from the rules governing the recording of crime impacts on service delivery and under certain circumstances in fact promotes a more consumer focussed approach? Whilst the rules may provide a more equitable data set across forces, from which performance can supposedly be judged, adherence to the rules does not appear to address the underlying issues expounded by the research. Later research (Chatterton and Bingham 2006) indicates that officers are tempted not to record crimes owing to the volume of work that they experience. As a consequence, their inability to investigate the crimes and obtain a positive disposal impacts on whether they record a crime in the first place.

One of the issues identified is that of labelling an event as a crime. Official crime rates are artificially constructed and ‘the first process by which an action becomes a crime statistic … is the recognition of an action as a crime’ (Bottomley and Pease 1986, p. 19). This appears to have an impact on the type of response the event is accorded within the control room and the manner in which the attendant officer will view the event (Pepinsky 1972). If, as appears to be the case, officers and staff concentrate efforts on crime control, then other supposedly less serious matters, not labelled as crime, are given less priority. Furthermore, there is a propensity for control room staff and officers to depersonalise events and label them in stereotypical fashion giving them labels such as domestic, nuisance youths, or suspicious (see MacCabe and Sutcliffe 1978).
And yet many of these so-called non-crime events can be labelled as crimes. Invariably many of them are equally distressing for the victim and in the context of affecting the victim’s quality of life, serious matters. These quality of life issues were highlighted in a survey of BCU commanders to be a key issue for policing (Loveday and McClory 2007; Superintendents’ Association 2003). Despite this, the research indicates that ‘[f]ormal action is considerably less likely in juvenile trouble situations, suspicious person situations and non criminal disputes’ (Black 1968, pg. 179).

To some extent arbitrary conventions which govern the compilation of police statistics may influence the behaviour of police officers on the ground (Steer 1980). It would appear therefore that the rules that govern the recording of crime have a negative impact on service delivery, albeit somewhat abstract and difficult to measure. In this context, instead of officers and staff dealing with the individual reporting an event and where required the event itself, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, they rationalise events into those that must be dealt with. That is, those that are a clear crime and those they can work their way around29.

In some cases this might simply be because other factors impinge on the ability of the officer, such as a lack of knowledge of the law and procedures or available time. In others it is clearly a case of selective labelling, possibly because they do not see this as ‘proper’ policing (Burrows and Tarling 1987) or because to label it as a crime would create additional work. Clearly, the inflexible labelling of events required by the Home Office Counting Rules and the NCRS fails to take into account the diverse nature of events and the consequences of applying such labels. In effect each crime event is given equal weighting in terms of recording and detection. By way of example, Chatterton and

29 An explanation of the ways in which officers deal with situations in order to avoid additional work is particularly well covered by Black (1968)
Bingham (2006) provide commentary on the top down dictate to obtain sanction detections and the impact on the recording of crime.

In an example, a mother phones the police to inform them that her fourteen year old son has been stealing from her purse. An officer describes how previously it would have been recorded as a crime and have been written up and detected by ‘other means’. Instead he is required to arrest the youth and interview him and caution him. ‘His name’s now in the system and that could affect his career opportunities in the future. How does his mother feel now – all she wanted was an informal warning (Chatterton and Bingham 2006, pg. 53).’ This stripping back of discretion has been recognised in a more recent review of policing (see Flanagan 2008).

Whilst the officer clearly advocates a process that is less draconian, he still views a need for a crime record to be created and detected as a normal course of events. However, it is debatable whether a crime record should be created in the first place and this brings us on to the second question.

Does a deviation from the rules governing the recording of crime under certain circumstances in fact promote a more consumer-focussed approach? Clearly in some cases, such as the one described above it would. There appears to be little to be gained by creating a crime record in these circumstances other than to draw the youth into the criminal justice system and add to the bureaucratic processes that are already in existence. Certainly in terms of gauging levels of crime, the recording of such an event would add little value.

Although there were only ten per cent of the cases researched where this could be said to definitely apply, there is undoubtedly some merit in suggesting that a crime record should not be created in every case. For example, the mother who in discussion with her daughter and the police officer, resolved to address the issues of bullying of her daughter
through the school, rather than taking a formal route, would have been unhappy if the officer had recorded a crime and then proceeded to speak to the offender. In that particular case the officer looked to take this option and deal with it by means of ‘other detection’. Such action may have had repercussions for the daughter although subsequently, a more appropriate solution seems to have considered and taken. Clearly apart from the repercussions for the victim, the recording of the crime would have, under the performance regime that existed at the time, brought with it issues around the fact the crime was undetected and this would add to the focus on performance of the officer, and those he worked to. Likewise, the victim who had his car damaged would not have wanted the officers to take formal action against his sister’s boyfriend, despite the fact that he may initially have wished to do so when he called the police.

Would recording of a crime have made a difference in those cases that had not been given a crime label but were considered to be a crime, such as those cases labelled as nuisance youths and the like? It is impossible to tell, they may have attracted a higher profile and therefore some action, but one of the clear problems highlighted in this report is that incidents appear to be dealt with in isolation (MacCabe and Sutcliffe 1978) by response officers and as a consequence whole series of events go unnoticed or are blatantly ignored.

There are clear indications that officers are reluctant to take on issues that are less than straightforward. Where offences do not provide the officers with an immediate and recognisable power of arrest, for example, less serious public order offences that had occurred prior to an officer’s arrival, officers were reluctant to deal with the matter. The rationale behind this appears to be that significantly more and sometimes protracted work would be required to arrange an interview with an offender. Similarly, offences involving juvenile offenders attract more work resultant of the fact that appropriate adults are required to be present for interview purposes and this can at times be difficult to arrange. It seemed that in many cases, anything less than straightforward, led to a deviation from
the rules but more to the point also led to no action at all, or as described by previous authors ‘cuffing’ (Bottomley and Coleman 1981; MacCabe and Sutcliffe 1978).

**Under-recording of crime and the efficacy of research methodologies**

The research examined the methodologies and findings of previous work conducted by Burrows et al (2000), Farrington and Dowds (1985) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2000b). In doing so it is noted that undoubtedly, the explanation for the differences in the reported recording rates lies in the interpretation of the content of the incident logs as well as an interpretation of what is deemed and not deemed to be an allegation of a crime. Whilst ‘definite’ allegations such as a burglary and shoplifting were less problematic, ‘possible’ allegations were considerably more so. Despite the use of a ‘balance of probabilities’ approach to determine crime events when examining incident logs, it became clear that the logs often failed to provide sufficient detail to determine whether a crime event had occurred. This was particularly so where witnesses to events had not been seen and further information was required. In support of the previous research it was found that where there was clear tangible evidence of a crime, a reported event was invariably recorded as such.

Taking into account the above findings, further triangulation of the data suggested that those events reported by victims were more likely to be recorded as crimes than those reported on behalf of the victim or where no victim was apparent. Victims reported nearly three quarters of the ‘alleged’ crime incidents and three quarters of those were recorded. However there was a marked difference in the recording rates for commercial or corporate victims (87.3%) when compared to individual victims (70.1%).

It was apparent that a clear knowledge of the law and the Home Office Counting Rules is required to even begin to unravel the intricacies of reported crime events. However, despite having significant experience and knowledge in both of these fields, the conclusion from the analysis of the data, contained within the incident logs, was that
recording rates were invariably difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty and that there were far too many gaps in the data to draw any definite conclusions. Whilst the findings in terms of recording rates were comparable to previous research, the overriding conclusion must be that police incident data is a poor measure of crime events. This in itself belies the misguided notion that police recorded crime statistics will somehow provide a picture of crime at national and local level and that any audit will provide an adequate validation of those statistics.

**Police officers' and police staff' perceptions**

Police officers and staff provided a clear indication that a significant number of factors impinge on the way they go about their business of recording crime. To some, there was a need for pragmatism, both in respect of what they can be reasonably expected to record and the final outcome of the recording of the event. Where it was not possible for officers or staff to verify that a crime had been committed, for example the victim had not been seen, there was a distinct reluctance to record a crime. Likewise where an event reported was one of seemingly everyday common occurrence, such as damage, including graffiti, the volume of crimes was considered to be prohibitive to crime recording and viewed as a needless bureaucratic exercise in crime record accountancy.

Considerations were also given to the final outcome of a report, as was often the case it was reported that victims did not wish to pursue the matter and therefore little or no time should be expended on creating a record. Not only was this seen as pragmatic but it was also seen as a means of ensuring that further needless and often potentially inflammatory work was avoided. This inflammatory work was seen as the product of recorded and undetected crime records where the victim did not wish to pursue the matter but the police insisted on dealing with the offender in order to detect the crime; regardless of the subsequent consequences on the victim and offender relationship. Conversely some officers had a mind to detection targets and therefore the mantra of the managerial
process was more important than the wishes of the victim or the potential problems that visiting an alleged offender might cause.

What also became clear was that officers were cognisant of other factors that impinged on the crime recording process; whilst it was deemed acceptable not to record some crimes it was invariably seen as inconceivable that other more serious crimes such as rape should not be recorded. This is in almost direct contrast to previous reports about the attrition rates around this kind of crime (Harris and Grace 1999; Lea et al, 2003; Newburn 1995; Smith 1989) and perhaps suggests that the management of crime figures in some crime types is not always resultant of activities at street level, but of activity further along the process where management ideals are brought to bear prior to the formulation of statistics that are returned to the Home Office.

In keeping with the findings of previous research (Burrows et al 2000; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2000a), a considerable number of officers and staff took an evidential approach to crime recording and therefore a lack of evidence was seen as a major obstacle in verifying whether a crime had occurred. This coupled with a lack of clarity around events that had been reported, a lack of knowledge of current policies, a lack of clear knowledge of the law and the existence of conflicting policies and priorities, seemed to cause considerable confusion. Some officers thought they had a good professional knowledge of the law and the requirements placed upon them in terms of crime recording and yet indicated they would not record all crimes presented to them, despite then stating that crime recording was an important element in ascertaining crime trends.

More often than not there was a failure to recognise the intricacies of the Home Office Counting Rules so that in cases where perhaps two crimes should have been recorded only one crime was. Furthermore, officers sometimes recorded the wrong crimes and were confused over what should be recorded and what would form the basis of a charge.
The findings of the research, in respect of the officers and staff involved in crime recording, essentially mirrored many of the findings of previous research but more pointedly gave a clear indication that these were as Lipsky (1980) would describe, true ‘street level bureaucrats’, attempting to make sense of and manage conflicting priorities. This is where there is an apparent departure from the findings of previous research. Whilst workload management is a common thread, the recognition of the realities of the social world is not.

The implied and at times overt criticism levelled at officers and staff for not recording events as crimes, often fails to take into account these realities and makes assumptions that demand is effectively managed on their behalf, and that events are easily labelled either as crimes or not at the time the officer is dealing with the event. The consequence of this is that officers and staff manage the demand presented to them at any given moment and that any event that requires additional work, to ascertain whether an event is a crime, is curtailed in an attempt to manage demand in that narrow window of time before the next call for service is reached. In effect the event is managed to prevent any future impact on demand. This managing of demand and its corollary ‘defining down of crime’ at a street level is a response to the managerial demands that simplify the social world in pursuit of management ideals.
Chapter 14  Conclusion

An inevitable conclusion is that deviation from the rules governing crime recording, identified by previous research was, and remains a product of inevitable tensions between the situational realities of frontline policing and the bureaucratic demands placed upon police officers resultant of performance measurement requirements. The introduction of the NCRS has made little difference to the validity and usefulness of police crime statistics, particularly in gauging crime levels and effects. The crime recording process and its corollary crime statistics are a complex product of social behaviour resultant, not necessarily, as a product of crime in society but of the different pressures and influences in situational, social, political and organisational contexts of how the statistics are compiled.

The NCRS has introduced a new pressure and influence but has not simplified the process, merely added to it in a more regulatory manner. Some minor crime may be recorded more consistently as police forces and individual members of staff focus their attention on how they record crime, but this focus may be seen not as a ‘victim centred approach’ promoted by ACPO as being a mainstay of the NCRS but as a symptom of audit and fear of censure for failure to comply. Almost inevitably officers have become busier due to the introduction of the NCRS, not trying to provide the public with a service, but trying to service a seemingly endless bureaucratic machine that leaves little room for manoeuvre and removes the discretion required to police effectively.

But it is more than this, the use of recorded and detected crime as a measure of performance has a stranglehold on the very notion of professionalism, it is so inculcated
in the police organisation that it stifles discretion and risks alienating the very people that call upon the police to deliver a service. That is not to say that this is the only factor involved. Limited resources and increasing demand have a major impact on 'street level' realities and although at times service delivery has to be prioritised, it seems clear that it should not be prioritised towards what central government deem a priority but towards what the professional deems is important given all the circumstances that they are aware of at the time.

Previous research (see Loveday and McClory 2007; Superintendents' Association 2003) highlighted that BCU commanders struggled with top down targets that failed to reflect local priorities, most of which involved quality of life issues such as alcohol abuse, disorderly behaviour and nuisance youths. Is a car that has been broken into really more important than the old lady who is vulnerable and afraid about what might happen next because she has been subjected to constant harassment from youths? Such comparisons may be purely subjective but serve to highlight that the imposition of top down targets and rigid rules around recorded crime stifle the ability to recognise what really matters.

However, there seems little point in front line police officers complaining about the stripping back of discretion (Chatterton and Bingham 2006) when undoubtedly, as this research has shown, that discretion is not always used wisely to the good of the communities they serve. Professional status and the use of discretion are not a right, they need to be earned, but tight bureaucratic control through rigorous rules, accountancy and audit will not improve true performance, just provide a thin veneer of respectability through which political reputations can be enhanced.

What becomes clear from the development of the new performance measurement regime APACS (Home Office 2008e) and the publication of the Green Paper (Home Office 2008a) is that governmental control over service delivery has not been relinquished but
rather re-branded and is commensurate with the ethos of ‘loose tight’ control described by Elcock (1991, pg.41), as quoted by Ham and Hill (1993). The need for police forces to meet data requirements is still as onerous and the effort expended will still be skewed in favour of what is measured and measurable. A reduction in the bureaucracy, resultant of managerialism, remains a distant and idealistic illusion particularly in light of the Government’s vision to provide both a strengthened HMIC and the Audit Commission with an even more intrusive role in the inspection and auditing of police forces and authorities (Home Office 2008a, b). The temptation to produce league tables, whether official or not, will be seen as too good an opportunity to be missed.

The relinquishing of some of the rigid rules around the recording of crime, as suggested by Sir Ronnie (2008), coupled with an ability to utilise discretion and professional judgement may seem a tantalising solution to the bureaucratic shackles that disable delivery of frontline policing. Such a change though is in direct conflict with the publicly expounded reasoning behind the introduction of NCRS, that is, comparable recorded crime figures. To suggest that a set of rules could apply to the recording of one level of crimes and other, less rigid rules, apply to another will only serve to complicate and confuse those asked to record the data in the first instance. Such suggestions fail to recognise the operational realities of the imposition of top down managerialism and will only serve to further widen the gap between what the public call on the police to do and what the Government set out as crime priorities.

In 1996 an independent inquiry established by the Police Foundation and the Policy Studies Institute (The Police Foundation and Policy Studies Institute 1996) published its findings into the ‘Role and Responsibilities of the Police’. In it the committee reiterated the police service’s Statement of Common Purpose:

The purpose of the police service is to uphold the law fairly and firmly; to prevent crime; to pursue and bring to justice those who break the law; to
keep the Queen’s peace; to protect, help and reassure the community; and
to be seen to do this with integrity, common sense and sound judgement.

(p. xii)

Furthermore the report is quite clear that ‘preventing crime and, still more, catching criminals cannot and should not invariably be given priority above all other police responsibilities’ (p. xii). Whether by design or otherwise, ‘catching criminals’ and bringing them to justice has been the predominant theme of recent times. Common sense, and sound judgement and at times integrity, have been subservient to management ideals and political agendas, diverting resources away ‘from a variety of jobs which the public call upon the police to do …’(Reiner 1994, p. 156).

By setting only one top down target of ‘public confidence in the police’, the recent policing Green Paper (Home Office 2008a) suggests that the Government is moving away from imposing rigid rules and objectives, providing more flexibility and localism. Despite this heralded ‘new localism’ (Loveday and McClory 2007; McLaughlin 2007) the requirement to meet the Government PSAs (Her Majesty’s Treasury 2007), the introduction of APACs and the added muscle given to HMIC and the Audit Commission suggests otherwise. Whilst removal of the targets around sanction detections and offences brought to justice have been welcomed (see House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008), reduction targets remain and forces crime rates will still be measured and compared in respect of volume crimes and serious violent crime.

The criticism of the Green Paper by the Police Federation (see Federation 2008; Police Federation 2008) that it concentrates too much on neighbourhood policing to the detriment of response and CID resources opens up even wider issues. Police forces are required to deliver a response function, neighbourhood policing, tackle serious and organised crime and combat terrorism. Even the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee had doubts as to whether this was realistic, stating that they were concerned
‘about the shortfall in police capacity to deal with serious and organised crime. In our view there should be more resources made available to the police’ (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008, p.80). The requirement to carefully balance resources to meet demands, including the new Policing Pledge (Home Office 2008d) brings with it some real managerial dilemmas. If neighbourhood policing is to succeed then abstractions need to be kept to a minimum (see House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 2008), but this puts a strain on other resources.

The net effect may well be that faced with overwhelming demand, response officers and control room staff will continue to manage down incidents in an attempt to ease workloads. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, many of the problems that the public call upon the police to resolve require both a quick time response and longer term follow up. If response work is about ‘wrestling with the alligators’ and neighbourhood policing is about ‘dredging the swamp’ (Federation 2008), the trick will lay in the ability to integrate the two and deliver the Policing Pledge at the same time with ever diminishing resources.

It is not the intention to suggest that the police service should be devoid of scrutiny: after all significant sums of public money are spent on the provision of policing (Solomon et al, 2007). Instead the thesis demonstrates that a concentration of measures on a single element of policing, that is crime, is fraught with danger. It leads to a manipulation of data to provide pleasing results and a narrow focus on that which is measured and purportedly easily measurable to the detriment of that which is not.

The increase in effort expounded to, first of all direct activity, and then to measure it and the consequential explosion of bureaucracy to facilitate this does not appear to suggest that public money is well spent. The results only seem to serve to enhance political careers rather than delivering a service to the public. The first flaw in the general theory that recorded crime can be used as a measure of performance is simply that the statistics
that form the basis of official statements about crime are ‘no more than a reflection of the crimes actually reported to, and recorded by, the police’ (Koffman 1996, pg. 1) and are used in a way which best suits the purpose of the user. ‘Blatant misuse of the statistics often apparently goes unnoticed, often by the same commentators who are quick to point to the limitations of the statistics in other contexts (Knox 1999, pg. 8).’

Clearly further research is required in respect of the issues discussed and in particular the impact of the introduction of NCRS. Such work would need to be carefully tailored to ascertain whether those incidents that had either previously not been recognised or not been recorded as crimes are now dealt with differently. Likewise the incidents now accorded labels such as anti-social behaviour under the new National Standard for Incident Recording (Home Office 2006a) require careful scrutiny to ascertain whether these too are capable of being afforded crime labels, or if not, whether there is any change in the way in which they are responded to. Above all else, there needs to be a recognition that the incident data is likely to lack sufficient detail to stand alone as the basis for any judgements, and therefore other qualitative data is essential to provide any meaningful analysis and insight. Such approaches are worthy of consideration in a wider context of gauging police performance.

However, whatever the measurement employed to judge police performance ‘[i]t is clear that any attempt to measure levels of ‘actual crime’ should be the responsibility of someone outside the justice system’ (Selke and Pepinsky 1982, pg. 341) and the use of police recorded data for this purpose is simply a meaningless exercise. Recent newspaper articles highlight the fallibility of police crime statistics. ‘Violent crime underestimated for 10 years’ (Russell 2008) and ‘Home Office blames violent crime rise on police undercounting’ (Travis 2008) suggested both a significant rise in violent crime and a calculated manipulation of data. However, it was ‘Not as bad as it looks’ (Reiner 2008). The reported rises in most serious violent crime was attributed, not to the miscounting by the police but to a change in the Home office Counting Rules for
Recorded Crime (Home Office 2008c) when the category ‘grievous bodily harm was extended in its scope’ (Reiner 2008).

For all the rules, regulations, inspection and audit, the complexities of the social interactions throughout the processes of reporting and recording incidents and crime will consistently thwart any attempts to the use the data as a meaningful performance measure.
Appendix A  Policing objectives and performance indicators

Figure A1  Home Secretary’s Key Objectives for Policing 1994-95

1. To maintain and if possible increase the number of detections for violent crimes.
2. To increase the number of detections for burglaries of people’s homes.
3. To target and prevent crimes which are a particular local problem in partnership with the public and other local agencies.

Figure A2  Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 1994-95

1. The number of violent crimes detected per 100 officers.
2. The number of burglaries of dwellings detected per 100 officers.
3. No high level indicator is currently available. Work on developing such an indicator for 1995/96 will be taken forward over the next year, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives.
**Figure A3  Home Secretary’s Ministerial Priorities for Policing 1999-2000**

1. To deal speedily and effectively with young offenders and to work with other agencies to reduce offending and re-offending.
2. To identify and reduce local problems of crime and disorder in partnership with local authorities, other local agencies and the public.
3. To target and reduce drug related crime in partnership with other local agencies, via the local Drug Action teams, in line with the Government’s strategy ‘Tackling drugs to build a better Britain’.

**Figure A4  Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 1999-2000**

1. (i) The percentage of cases relating to young offenders dealt with within relevant targets, and the percentage of cases meeting joint performance management quality targets.
   (ii) In consultation with other youth justice agencies to have established, by April 2000, fast-tracking schemes for persistent young offenders with locally-agreed targets and monitoring arrangements.
   (iii) To have put in place, by April 2000, arrangements for administering and monitoring the Final Warning scheme, and delivering intervention programmes, in co-operation with other agencies and consistent with Home Office guidance.
2. (i) Progress in meeting the local targets set as a result of the local audit of crime and disorder.
   (ii) Local levels of recorded crime.
   (iii) The effect on local crime levels of action to tackle repeat victimisation.
   (iv) Local levels of recorded vehicle crime.
3. (i) The number of arrests for supply and possession with intent to supply controlled drugs per 10,000 population and, of those, how many related to heroin.
   (ii) The number of offenders referred to and entering treatment programmes as a result of arrest referral schemes.
Figure A5  Home Secretary’s Ministerial Priorities for Policing 2000-01

1. To reduce local problems of crime and disorder in partnership with local authorities, other local agencies and the public
2. To increase trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities

Figure A6  Best Value Performance Indicators 2000-01

| BVPI 120 | Level of crime (using British Crime Survey) |
| BVPI 121 | Fear of crime (using British Crime Survey) |
| BVPI 125 | Total recorded crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
| BVPI 126 | Domestic Burglaries per 1,000 households and percentage detected |
| BVPI 127 | Violent crimes per 1000 population and percentage detected; of those Robberies per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
| BVPI 128 | Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
| BVPI 129 | The number of offenders dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs per 10,000 population |

Figure A7  Best Value Performance Indicators 2001-02

| BVPI 120 | Level of crime (using British Crime Survey) |
| BVPI 125 | Total recorded crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
*BVPI 126 | Domestic Burglaries per 1,000 households and percentage detected |
*BVPI 127 | Robberies per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
*BVPI 128 | Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected |
BVPI 129 | a) Number of offenders charged, reported for summons or cautioned for supply offences in respect of class A drugs per 10,000 population |
| | b) of the overall figure, the number which related to cocaine |
| | c) of the overall figure, the number which related to heroin |
BVPI 136 | percentage of notifiable offences that were detected where a person has been charged, reported for summons or cautioned, or the offence has been taken into consideration by a court |
BVPI 141 | percentage of racist incidents where further investigative action is taken and percentage of racially-aggravated crimes detected |
*Police Authorities to set targets in accordance with Home Office guidance of 29 Feb 2000.
Figure A8 Secretary of State’s Ministerial Priorities for Policing 2002-03

1. To help create safe communities by reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder through effective partnership working, including reducing the availability and use of Class A drugs

2. To reduce the fear of crime in all sections of the community and in particular to increase trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities

3. To increase the number of offences for which offenders, and particularly persistent offenders, are caught and brought to justice, in partnership with other criminal justice agencies

Figure A9 Best Value Performance Indicators 2002-03

BVPI 120 Using the British crime Survey, (a) the level of crime, (b) BVPI 121 the fear of crime, and (c) BVPI 122 feelings of public safety

BVPI 126 Domestic Burglaries per 1,000 households and percentage detected.

BVPI 127 Violent crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected,
broken down to show:

a) Violent offences committed by a stranger per 1,000 population;

b) Violent offences committed in a public place per 1,000 population;

c) Violent offences committed in connection with licensed premises per 1,000 population;

d) Violent offences committed under the influence per 1,000 population;

e) Robberies 1,000 population and percentages detected (Only for authorities within five metropolitan police authority districts);

BVPI 128 Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population and percentage detected

BVPI 129 a) Number of offenders charged, reported for summons or cautioned for supply offences in respect of class A drugs per 1,000 population; and

b) of the overall figure of (a) above, the number which related to cocaine

c) of the overall figure, the number which related to heroin.

BVPI 136 percentage of notifiable offences that were detected where a person has been charged, reported for summons or cautioned, or the offence has been taken into consideration by a court

BVPI 141 percentage of recorded racially-aggravated crimes detected.
## Appendix B  Additional figures and tables

### Table B1  Incident, victim type, and reporting person

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of incident (recorded)</th>
<th>Person reporting</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Victim type</th>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Acting on behalf of victim</th>
<th>Unconnected third party</th>
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<td>Attempt burglary</td>
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<td>Adult</td>
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Table B2  Incident and closing types

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<th>Advice given/ no offences</th>
<th>Area searched/ no offences</th>
<th>Area searched/ no trace</th>
<th>No complaint</th>
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<th>No offences/ no complaint</th>
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Table B3  Incident type and initial caller requirements

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<th>Obtain advice</th>
<th>Obtain positive action</th>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt Criminal damage</td>
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<td>Attempt robbery</td>
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<td>Robbery</td>
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<td>Harassment/threats to kill</td>
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<td>3</td>
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Table B4  Incidents, crime types and the percentages of crimes recorded

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<th>Crime type</th>
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<th>Total incidents resulting in recorded crime</th>
<th>Percentage recorded as a crime</th>
<th>Resourced incidents not resulting in recorded crime</th>
<th>Resourced incidents resulting in recorded crime</th>
<th>Percentage of resourced incidents recorded as a crime</th>
<th>Crime type percentage of total</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>55.4</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>92.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<td>66.7</td>
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Table B5  Friend or relative reporting, incident crime type and final result

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<th>Enquiries Completed Or No Action</th>
<th>Further Enquiries</th>
<th>Info. Only</th>
<th>No Offence</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Harassment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Theft</td>
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<td>Theft of vehicle</td>
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<td>Friend/ relative (Witness)</td>
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* Denotes incident where the incident log also indicates that the victim declined to make a complaint.
Table B6  Third party reporting, incident crime type and final result

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<th>Area search</th>
<th>Enquiries completed or no action</th>
<th>Further enquiries Info. only</th>
<th>No offence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>Burglary dwelling</td>
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<td>Damage vehicle</td>
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<td>Theft from vehicle</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

* Denotes incident where the incident log also indicates that the victim declined to make a complaint
### Table B6A  Personal victim, incident crime type and final result

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<th>Incident crime type</th>
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<th>Further enquiries required/person arrested</th>
<th>Info. only</th>
<th>No offence</th>
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<td>2 (1)*</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5(2)*</td>
<td>34(16)*</td>
<td>23(8)*</td>
<td>20(12)*</td>
<td>8(2)*</td>
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* Denotes incident where the incident log also indicates that the victim declined to make a complaint
Table B6B  Commercial victim, incident crime type and final result

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident crime type</th>
<th>Area search negative</th>
<th>Enquiries completed or no action</th>
<th>Further enquiries required/ person arrested</th>
<th>Info. only</th>
<th>No offence</th>
<th>Crime report completed</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Attempt burglary non dwelling</td>
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<td></td>
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* Denotes incident where the incident log also indicates that the victim declined to make a complaint
## Table B7  Focus groups and scenario responses

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<th>Scenario No.</th>
<th>No Crimes recorded (Yr possible)</th>
<th>Crime type</th>
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<td>Allegation made by victim</td>
<td>Lack of evidence of a crime</td>
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<td>Evidence of a crime</td>
<td>Victims wishes no complaint</td>
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<td>Seriousness of offence</td>
<td>Only if reported by the victim</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Unable to trace victim</td>
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|              |                                  | 86  | 45  | 12  | 6   | 17  | 3   | 43  | 18  | 16  | 12  | 2 |

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Appendix C  Interview prompts

You contacted the police recently to report (incident) Explain reason for call

Initial call
Tell me what you told the operator you spoke to
Tell me what the operator said to you
What did you expect the police would do as a result of your call?
What did the operator tell you that would happen as a result of your call?

Officers attended
Tell me what you told the police officer/s when/ he/ she they came to see you
Tell me what the officer/s said to you
What did you expect the police officer/s would do as a result of what you told them?
What did the police officers tell you they would do as a result of what you told them?
What did the police officer/s do as a result of what you told them?

Other
Did you expect this to be officially recorded as a crime that would form part of the national and local statistics?
If this were recorded as a crime how would you feel about that?
How did you feel about the overall service provided by the police on this occasion?
In what way if any could the police have improved on the way they dealt with this incident?
Is there anything you wish to add?
Appendix D  Interviews

Interview 1

Incident Log

Callers [sic] daughter was walking home this evening and was approached by a group of five youths. They grabbed her by the neck and hit her. Three of the youths were girls – all known to the IP and all aged around 15/16. The names of those involved are: [three names provided]. Caller said that her daughter is shaken by the incident. Nothing was stolen from her: They did take her phone but gave it back. Caller’s daughter is called [name]. All the girls go to the same school. I/P is too scared to go to school.

Interview

Well what happened was there was a gang of girls, … couple of boys there but I don’t think they actually did anything, and the older girl called her over, I think they called her over and they were asking her for cigarettes and she doesn’t smoke, they didn’t believe her, they took her bag off her, they went through her bag, she tried to walk away, they stood round her in a circle so she couldn’t get away … one of them, the one who’s left school, she pulled her back by her neck and one of the others had got … that yellow banding stuff … and they were whacking her round her legs with it.

Describing what she had told the police operator the interviewer said

My daughter had been sort of roughed up by a gang of kids, she was pretty shaken up, one of the people involved has actually done things to her before
and I wanted it reported and logged, because one of the people involved is not a very nice lady who is known to you and I was a bit concerned for my daughter's safety …. And then the phone rings for eternity, because obviously at that time of night, I don't know if that's when, because at one point I know the station becomes unmanned normally doesn't it and then it clicked through, because I thought we were going to end up, up at...or somewhere, but no, we did actually get somebody. … I told them and at first they were like, "oh okay fine, it's logged" and I was like yeah well I'm not very happy with just "it's logged", I want something done about it so they said that they'd get somebody out but they were obviously busy, didn't know when, would it matter what sort of time and I said well no, not really, as long as it's you know this side of midnight it's not, it's not too big a problem, so .... Well they, they were sort of like, it kind of felt a bit like, God you know, I know on the grand scale of things it is minor and it is not, you know, earth shattering sort of thing, but it's important to me because it's my child, you know and I kind of got the feeling it was like, oh we'll pacify her and come out if we have to, do you know what I mean.

Describing the conversation she had with the officer and what her daughter had told the police officer whilst in her presence the interviewee said:

I said, look, I don't want it, I'm not going to take it any further unless anything else happens, and he was like, well do you want me to go round there and do something about this now and he was saying something about, he could go round there and get them to sign his note book or something saying what they'd done. Well I didn't want to do that because I thought it would probably make the incident worse ... so what I sort of said was, well I mean I do believe in giving people the second chance although I think this particular young lady's had lots of second chances, or I said, look I was worried that if
she gets a policeman on her door step, because at the end of the day my
daughter wasn't hurt, she was frightened, she took the threats seriously as
have we and the school, because we know this lady's past, but at the end of
the day she wasn't sort of badly injured or anything like that, nothing was
actually stolen from her, she wasn't, you know she, she came away just
shaken up really and I felt it was a bit heavy handed to sort of be on the door
step going, and I don't, I don't really want to go to court unless I have to, my
daughter is in her last year at school, she's struggling with school, she's
under a hell of a lot of pressure … and I didn't feel that that was appropriate
unless we absolutely have to.

Interview 2

Incident Log
Inf is terrified to park car at H/A as there are 4 youths 17YRS waiting outside. Inf
said they have threatened him and kicked his car as he left location 1/2 HR ago.
He is waiting at top of road too afraid to return. Inf is in VX Astra [index]. Inf feels
they know he is weak and will take his car and attack him.

Interview
… they'd had a go at my car several times, set the alarms off. Sort of just
trying to mess around and, and generally piss me off. And there was a gang
of about four or five about there and they stood in the middle of the road so
that I couldn't drive up and I could drive, sort of drive round them and slowly
and as I went by them they tried kicking the door mirror off. So I just went, I
didn't stop didn't say nothing didn't bib at them, didn't make any gestures, I
just went. And when I came back they were stood behind my other car,
where I would normally park and as I came back and it concerned me that I
was going to have to park where they were standing, get out and walk across
the road to my flat. I was extremely worried, especially after having a road rage attack against me … they have made various threats beforehand.

Describing a previous incident the interviewee went on:

I drove down, I parked, I got out of my car, again, again they've been standing in the middle of the road and I couldn't drive down, and I stopped, I wasn't going to nudge them, I wasn't going to get out and say anything to them, I didn't make any gestures, anything to upset them and one, one of the younger lads was there was holding a three foot long piece of wood. The other one stood right in front of the car looking straight at me to say well come on then get out of the car. And I wasn't prepared to, I drove down, parked up and he, and they all come down together and he said my mate wants to fight you, I said I'm not interested and I started to walk in and he came and they then, they then said well, we're going to steal your car and rail it round. And I've had various instances where they've, they've been ringing the doorbell, the buzzer to the flat, you know as you keep pressing it and pressing it and pressing it just to piss us off. You know, and they've been throwing things at the car, and you know it's just one thing after another and you get to the point where I daren't go out because there's a bunch of eight or nine kids out there and there's nothing I can do on my own against them.

The interviewee described what he said to the police officers that attended:

I explained the situation to them you know, I said look I'm obviously frightened to death of this you know and this does worry me, it does, it really does worry me … but I feel like going out there at night and having to come home from work in the dark … there's all sorts of youths hanging around,
they hang around in the garages, they hang around in the flats, they smash all the doors off the flats.

Asked what the police officer told him could be done he replied:

Well there wasn't a lot he could do I suppose, if he turned up, he said, they'll all just scatter, I said yeah I know … he said they can't do anything, I mean they haven't actually committed crimes or anything. You know until, unless they actually assault me I suppose, then perhaps they can do something but I don't want to get in that situation.

Interview 3

Incident Log

Earlier today sus male 18–19 yrs taken inf nephews bike. Bike returned by another youth. Desc of male IC3 scruffy clothes.

Interview

I said that there's been an incident and someone tried to grab my nephew's bike … yeah and he took everything down and he said, he goes the bike has been found you know he couldn't come that day yeah so, because it happened at five o'clock and I was trying to contact you but I couldn't get through so, it was nearly seven o'clock when I contacted the man. He said he's taken the details and he says he's going to keep an eye in the [location] if anyone can find him and in the meantime he says if my children see him around they come and call us or I have to ring the police …. Well as you know, you know in [location] you know people are just saying it's a rubbish area, but it's not, we've been living here for many years and nothing like this has happened to my children before. I don't want the police to think that [location] is rubbish and not look into the matter. Well I don't know it's up to,
many people that think it's [location], once you say that you're in [location] they don't take interest in it.

Interview 4

Incident Log

‘Lad trying car door handles, happened a few mins ago, last seen walking up [location], desc as 17Yrs, dressed all in black’

Interview

There was some young lad in our front garden and the dog was going absolutely mental so it woke us up and my wife opened the door to him and asked him what he was doing and he just mumbled something and she told him to clear off and he just went across the road. Then he was just loitering about everywhere and I just kept my eye on him and he kept wandering off and coming back again, then he started trying all the door handles of the neighbours’ cars so at this point I though I’d better ring the police and the response I got from them was “perhaps he’s just waiting for his mates”, so I said, do you always try door handles when you're waiting for your mates …. So he said, “there's some funny people about you know”, so I said, yeah I can see that. He said he'd send somebody out.

When asked whether anyone had come to see him the interviewee replied:

Nobody came here no, they did, a police car did stop, he walked off round into [name of road] and I thought oh well he's gone now but he came walking back again and the police car came down and stopped him, they had a chat with him and I don't know what they did, they just let him go then.
Asked about the response from the police overall the interviewee went on to say:

Well the response afterwards was okay you know, I mean they was here within about ten minutes I suppose but it was just the attitude I got on the phone …. And as I say I don't know what they said to the lad anyway, they obviously was satisfied with his story so he just let him go and he wandered off in the end.

**Interview 5**

**Incident log**

‘there is[sic] about 8 kids in the tk [telephone kiosk] over the road smashing it up’

**Interview**

Well they've been in there quite regular and they smash it all up, I don't know who they are, there's quite a few of them, about nine of them, and they break all the telephone box and they shout abuse down the phone so obviously they're making phone calls to people, shouting out obscene things and basically trying to rip the door off and everything and they've done it a few times now, that's the second time I've thought oh, because I've seen them live repairing it and I thought oh I'm going to ring up you know …. Well I could hear all this noise, shouting about and banging and that … and I could hear them banging and pulling at the door and there was like, they were just like shouting abuse down the phone and they kept walking off and then coming back and then kicking it and banging and trying like they was trying to break the glass through … they pushed all the door I've seen it as I've walked passed, the doors all twisted.
Probed further about the attending officer's actions the interviewee went on to say:

But it took ages for someone to come …. When they did arrive it was one constable on his own and he went up to them, he got out of the car and he went up to them and they were all crammed in this phone box and outside as well and he spoke to them and then he got in his car and drove off … and that was it and then when he'd gone they were still doing it so …. Well I thought he'd catch them in the act and you know, I don't know arrest them for or it or you know go and see the parents or something, because you know it's the only phone box round here and I'm lucky I'm on the phone now because if I, I'm on my own, I've got children, if I needed an ambulance or I needed somebody urgently and I go over there and it's broken … you know it's the only phone box for miles around here.

Interview 6

Incident log
Ex boyfriend has forced way into flat and assaulted female. Female very distressed. Off has left loc.

Interview
I went to shut the door because I didn’t want him coming in with me and he went to come in the house and he closed the door and he took that as an insult and tried to kick the door open and then grabbed me and threw me against the doorframe and then tried to pull me out of the house and then his dad called him back to the car then he verbally abuses me … so I’ve got a bit shaken up and decided to call the police because like it’s not the first time he’s verbally getting me.
Probed further about what she wanted the police to do the interviewee went on to say:

Well I, I was just … because well, I wasn’t sure at that time whether or not if I press charges it would actually make things worse for myself … so it’s a little bit of intimidation for the fact that I know that I’m down here on my own and I know that his family will back him up one hundred per cent.

Interview 7

Incident Log
Inf reporting her 13 yr old son has been assaulted by a group of youths in [location] Park. Son is too scared to go out. Mother wants to see an officer.

Interview
Asked to describe what the officer had said when he/she attended the interviewee responded:

Well she, well it was basically the lady just said to him that, what, what do you want to do about this and he says well what do you mean, and she says well you know what do you want me, what you’re calling us, what did you expect us to do? And he said find them. So she said, well she said, do you know their names and he says yeah I do know and so she, he told her the names and she said if you, if you take this further we can, we’re going to sit here and do a crime report and this that and the other thing which is going to take a great deal of time and then of course if we, you’ll go to court, it will be taken through the courts and you know all that, do you want that to happen. And he says, I don’t know and he, you know he’s a bit confused really. So she said well you know, or we could do it on a domestic level I think was the word she used and try and get the beat officer for [area] to speak to you to
find out who these people are because he might have a better idea and just

go from there so that's what he agreed to and that's how we left it.

Asked about how her son felt about what the officers had told him she replied:

I think he was basically put off because they did stress on the time you know

trauma that he would, you know sitting through a lengthy court were the

words and having an awful lot of questions, being confronted by these people

you know and of course he'd only just been assaulted and was scared

anyhow so I mean … you know he wasn't in really, I didn't feel, in a right

frame of mind.

Asked about the final outcome the interviewee replied she replied:

But when they mentioned the beat officer and then coming back to me and

you know, they wouldn't leave it like this and you know, telling him to stay

round the house for a few days until we can get it sorted out, all this sort of

thing you know that was fine but as I say nothing's happened.

Interview 8

Incident Log

Inf reporting [name] has damaged his car. Inf has got this on CCTV. Ongoing

harassment from [family] in village.

Interview

I reported that a car, he'd driven up from [location] in his car and pelted my

car with eggs. Now we've got it on video tape, so I phoned the police to tell

them and they'd come out and had a look at the video tape and they were

gob smacked you know, that they … but this bloke had actually been pathetic
enough to do such a juvenile thing … they took details and what not … and they said it has been noted and they were gonna [sic] go down and have a word with these people. They said next time we get any complaint about these other people that they’d come and take a second statement and they’d start proceedings for harassment.

Asked what the interviewee had expected of the officers he replied:

I was hoping that the officers would be able to turn round and say well yes it is harassment now and what not you know, well we thought something would come, but as I mean the worst bit, what’s the word, dubious about being able to do anything you know because we’ve been told yeah we’ll do this, we’ll do that and nothing comes of, and you get to the stage where you think well are the police really bothered, are they getting their fingers out or are they just sitting back and saying oh bollocks to the lot of it, you know.

Interview 9

Incident Log

Inf is being threatened by her ex-partner. He has threatened to kill her and says he is on his way round to her house now. She has received abusive emails and telephone calls, he has also threatened her friends.

Interview

… there was nothing they could do unless he came over to the house and said that my friends and family would have to take note and actually report it themselves or compile a list of all the times that he’s rang in the past, I did try to explain that he has rang in the past but they just said there’s nothing he could do unless he turned up at the house.
Asked what the interviewee thought about the officer’s response she replied:

I was upset because I thought if he turns up at the house you know will they take that seriously, it’s like no-one was paying any attention to what I’d said that it’s got to the point now that he’s like lost it, could he do anything, could he turn up, could he you know like there has been an incident since last week and it was like could he do, could he really harm me and the children you know and I’m worried about obviously their safety as well ....
Appendix E  Survey questionnaire

Incident specific

1. Regarding the attached incident, the OIS shows you as the person that dealt with the incident, is this correct?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

If no, go to Q7.

2. What sort of incident was alleged (tick the box).
   a) assault
   b) domestic
   c) public order
   d) harassment
   e) neighbour dispute
   f) criminal damage/ arson
   g) theft
   h) burglary
   i) Other (Please state below)
3. Was the incident reported by (tick the box).
   a) the alleged victim
   b) a third party not involved
   c) a witness
   d) the offender
   e) Other (please state)

4. Did you believe this incident to involve a crime

   Yes  No

   Please state reasons for your answer

5. Did you consider recording the incident as a crime?

   Yes  No

   Please state reasons for your answer
6. Did you record the incident as a crime?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

Please give the reasons for your answer

**Crime recording in general**

7. When you attend an incident do you sometimes find it difficult to decide whether it should be recorded as a crime?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

Please provide reasons for your answer.

8. Do you experience any difficulties when recording an incident as a crime or as a particular type of crime?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

What are these difficulties?
9. Is there anything that influences what you crime or do not crime?

Yes  No

If yes, what are these, please specify.

10. How important/ unimportant do you view the accuracy of recorded crime?

Very important  Important  Neither important or unimportant  Unimportant  Very unimportant

Please give your reasons for your answer at 10 above.

11. Should all crime that comes to the notice of the police be recorded?

Yes  No

Please give the reasons for your answer

12. Any other comments regarding crime recording that you wish to add.
Appendix F  Focus group scenarios

1. A woman phones up and states that she has returned home from a shopping trip and found the kitchen window at the back of her council house damaged. The damage amounts to crack in the glass spanning across the whole window. She does not know how the damage occurred but is reporting it to the police because she cannot have the window repaired by the council unless she gets a crime number from the police and gives the number to the council.

2. A person reports that a neighbour has damaged his fence. He does not wish you to take the matter any further but has reported this in case anything else happens. He does not want you to visit the neighbour. What if anything would you record?

3. Whilst driving around you see graffiti on a telephone box and a surrounding wall. The graffiti is new and you know it wasn't there yesterday.

30 Taken from, On the Record: Thematic Inspection Report on Police Crime Recording, the Police National Computer and Phoenix Intelligence System Data Quality (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2000a).
4. During the course of a patrol you come across a car that has a smashed quarter light, the ignition barrel has been removed and the radio appears to have been ripped out. PNC shows No trace lost or stolen and the previous keeper has notified DVLA that they are no longer the keeper of the vehicle. There are no current keeper details and you are unable to trace the owner of the vehicle.

5. You eventually manage to contact the owner of the vehicle. He is staying with a friend out of the county and will not return for a week. He states he will recover the vehicle on his return. You return to the same vehicle the following day. You notice the vehicle is now up on bricks, the wheels and headlights have been removed.

6. You receive a call from a person living in a block of flats. They state that they saw a fight outside between five men. During the fight they saw one man punch another in the face and this person fell to the floor. They are still lying there whilst the informant is making the call. On your arrival there is no sign of any of the parties involved.

7. Having carried out an area search you find the injured person who tells you that the alleged offender is his friend and they had a disagreement, which resulted in them punching each other. The injured person has been drinking heavily and does not wish to make any complaint, he has a bruise to the side of his face.

8. The incident has been captured on CCTV and you can identify all the parties involved.
9. You are called to a domestic dispute; on your arrival it is apparent that the occupants of the house a male and female have been involved in a fight. The woman has a red mark to her cheek. She decides she does not wish to make a complaint and will not support a prosecution however, she does tell you that the man hit her across the face.

10. You are called to a dwelling house where the occupants report that a small glass panel in the front door has been smashed. It does not appear that anyone had entered the premises.

11. You are called to a shopping precinct as a result of a radio call. A store detective has seen someone who had been in the store walk out with two bottles of alcoholic drink under their coat and run off. The store detective has given chase but lost this person. The store detective did not see the person remove the bottles from the shelf as their vision was obscured. They did however see two bottles under the person’s coat as they left the store and the store detective tells you the person did not have the bottles on them when they entered the store. There is no immediate way of telling what exactly was stolen.

12. A woman alleges she has been raped and names the offender. She states that she is not prepared to attend court and give evidence and she does not want the police to contact the person. She is simply reporting the offence so that the police are aware of the matter.

13. A filling station cashier reports that they have had a drive off. A red Escort filled up with £24-90 worth of petrol and the driver failed to pay. The cashier did not see the vehicle leave and there are no details on CCTV.
14. A filling station cashier reports that they have had a drive off. A red Escort filled up with £24-90 worth of petrol and the driver failed to pay. The cashier has details of the registration number of the vehicle, which are passed to you.

15. A filling station cashier reports that they have had a drive off. A red Escort filled up with £24-90 worth of petrol and the driver failed to pay. The cashier has details of the registration number of the vehicle, which are passed to you. You have been unable to get hold of the registered keeper during your tour of duty and you are about to finish work.

16. A filling station cashier reports that they have had a drive off. A red Escort filled up with £24-90 worth of petrol and the driver failed to pay. The cashier has details of the registration number of the vehicle, which are passed to you. A PNC check reveals previous keeper only no details of current keeper known. The vehicle was sold two months ago.
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