

Consultation on changes to recorded crime classifications and categories

BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATION

Police Recorded Crime is made up of those offences contained on the Notifiable List. These are all offences that must or could be heard in Crown Court (known as 'indictable' or 'triable either way') and a small number of lesser offences heard by Magistrates Courts (known as 'summary'). There are approximately 1,470 offences on the notifiable list (this number is subject to change as new offences come onto the statute book and others are repealed) and these are currently segregated into 148 classifications. The 148 classifications form the basis on which police forces return data to the Home Office and are then reflected in statistical publications.

When the Home Secretary commissioned the National Statistician to undertake an independent review of crime statistics for England and Wales in December 2010, the terms of reference asked her to consider "*whether or not the categories of notifiable offences for police recorded crime reported in the National Statistics can be sensibly rationalised without reducing public trust or damaging transparency*" (National Statistician, 2011). The National Statistician found that there may be some scope to reduce the number of crime categories used for the reporting and collection of police recorded crime, and to consider how some offences currently excluded from notifiable crime might be reflected in published recorded crime statistics. Some steps have already been taken to provide some further detail in National Crime Statistics publications. For example, the Home Office included figures on non-notifiable crimes and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incidents in their most recent annual crime statistics publication, Crime in England and Wales 2010/11 (Chaplin *et al.*, 2011).

The National Statistician also concluded that any change must be managed and introduced in a controlled and transparent way following consideration by the new Independent Advisory Committee on Crime Statistics that her report also recommended be established. The Home Secretary accepted all the recommendations in the National Statistician's review and the Advisory Committee is currently being constituted¹. In the meantime, to inform the Committee's consideration of the issue, producers and users are invited to comment on the proposals outlined in this paper. This consultation has been initiated ahead of the first meeting of the Independent Advisory Committee in order that the Committee are aware of users' views when they discuss the issues. It is planned to introduce any changes from April 2012.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first considers changes to the classifications used to collect recorded crime data – i.e. the individual offence classifications set out in the Home Office Counting Rules (Home Office, 2011). The second considers changes to the higher level categories used to present crime data within statistical bulletins. The detailed tables at Annex A shows the combined effect of these proposals.

CHANGES TO POLICE RECORDED CRIME COLLECTION

The changes outlined below support the proposals to alter the presentation of recorded crime statistics and to begin to address in part the views expressed by the National Statistician in her report that

Arguments have been made for both reducing and expanding the notifiable list of offences. The principles of the NCRS² remain important, but there may be some scope to rationalise the crime categories within the official statistics, and to consider further whether and how some offences currently excluded from police recorded crime data might be reflected in published crime statistics. While there should be no immediate changes, there is a case for reviewing the notifiable list and categories with a view to simplifying collection and interpretation, and improving quality.

¹ Advertisements to recruit the chair and non-executive members for the new committee were published on 12 October 2011, with a closing date of 1 November 2011: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-reviews/national-statistician-s-review-of-crime-statistics.html>

² National Crime Recording Standard. For more information see section 3.2 of the 'User Guide to Home Office Crime Statistics' (Home Office, 2011)

Similar views have been expressed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) often linked to arguments that the existing classifications are unnecessarily complex and difficult for the non-expert to understand. In addition, it has been argued that such revisions would deliver reductions in the burden and bureaucracy associated with the detailed information captured by current recording.

When responding to the National Statistician's report, the Home Secretary has noted that the new Committee should have due regard to the burdens imposed by the collections of crime data.

In her report, the National Statistician also emphasised the need for any such changes to be carefully considered and managed, particularly regarding any potential disruption of long term measures of crime:

On the other hand, this review has confirmed the importance to users of consistent time series to give an understanding of long term trends in crime. Changes to the notifiable list, or any other changes in definitions, classifications, or methodologies, will impact on the time series. The handling and presentation of any such changes to the published series must be made in an open and transparent way, and managed in a way which enables the impact to be understood, if trust in the statistics is to be maintained. Changes should be considered and managed transparently so they are seen to be free from political interference, take due regard of any impact on quality and continuity and on burden, and do not undermine public trust in the statistics.

The proposals for consideration under this consultation would alter the collection of recorded crime data by changing the framework of crime classifications contained within the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Proposed changes to police recorded crime classifications used for data collection

Current crime classifications		Proposed classification changes	
5A	Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life (wounding offences)	5D	Wounding
5A	Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life (endangering life offences)	5E	Endangering life
5B	Use of substance or object to endanger life		
5C	Possession of items to endanger life		
6	Endangering a railway passenger		
7	Endangering life at sea		
8F	Inflicting grievous bodily harm without intent		
8G	Actual bodily harm and other injury		
8K	Poisoning or female genital mutilation		
8H	Racially or religiously aggravated inflicting GBH without intent	8P	Racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury
8J	Racially or religiously ABH and other injury		
11	Cruelty to and neglect of children	11A	Cruelty to children
12	Abandoning Child under 2 years	58J	Racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage
58E	R/R aggravated criminal damage to a dwelling		
58F	R/R aggravated criminal damage to building non dwelling		
58G	R/R aggravated criminal damage to a vehicle		
58H	R/R aggravated other criminal damage		
62	Treason	62A	Other offences against the State or public order
63	Treason felony		
64	Riot		
65	Violent disorder		
66	Other offences against the State or public order		
68	Libel	99	Other offences
75	Betting, gaming and lotteries		
76	Aiding suicide		
78	Immigration offences		
82	Customs and Revenue offences		
84	Trade descriptions etc		
85	Health and Safety Offences		
87	Protection from eviction		
89	Adulteration of food		
91	Public health offences		
94	Planning laws		
99	Other indictable or triable-either-way offences		

None of the above changes would affect the overall coverage of the Notifiable Offences List nor should they result in any change to the overall numbers of recorded crimes. These revisions maintain the existing baseline of notifiable offences but would result in reduced number of higher level classifications with some finer detail lost. The recorded crime data collection has been subject to many changes over time. For example, in the last decade, changes to legislation, introduction of new classifications around particular areas of interest and changes to the principles and practice of crime recording in general have all had an effect. Such changes vary in their impact on the continuity of time series and care is always needed in interpreting long term trends in recorded crime. The detailed tables at annex A show the effect of these proposed changes and also show other main changes to the series since 2001/02.

As part of their remit the Independent Advisory Committee may commission further reviews to consider other changes in the future as well as considerations as to how offences currently outside the Notifiable List might be reflected in crime statistics.

The proposals presented here would see the abolition of 33 existing classifications and the creation of 7 new ones delivering a net reduction of 26. Refer to the detailed tables in annex A for an illustration of how these changes affect existing time series data. The changes proposed consist of 6 core components:

Violence against the Person

In April 2008 the classifications for wounding offences were disaggregated to support the introduction of Public Service Agreement targets on serious violent crime. This disaggregation saw the creation of the classifications *Inflicting grievous bodily harm (GBH) with intent (5A)*³, *GBH without intent (8F)* and *Actual bodily harm (ABH) and other injury (8G)*.

This change had the effect of splitting offences of GBH into two depending on the levels of injury and intent of the offender. Since 2008 the Police have commented that achieving good levels of data quality in this area is challenging and that it involves higher levels of burden than previously. There is a fine line between offences classified as *GBH without intent* (15 thousand offences in 2010/11) and *ABH* (328 thousand offences in 2010/11) and subjective interpretation has resulted in inconsistent recording in the past⁴. Collecting at a more aggregated level will see a higher level of confidence in the data. This proposal would return the recording of assaults largely to the pre-2008 position and bring all offences that amount to an actual injury to a specific intended victim into either *Wounding* (more serious injury) or *Assault with injury* (less serious injury). It is also proposed that offences amounting to acts endangering life would be amalgamated into one classification. This includes moving a small number of offences in law that should not result in any actual injury out of the Wounding classification.

It is also hoped that moving away from the technical terms of 'GBH' and 'ABH' to the more common language of 'Wounding' and 'Assaults' would aid public understanding of the statistics.

Racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury

To follow the moves outlined above, this proposal would bring the classification of racially or religiously aggravated assaults into line. It would see the merger of two existing classifications for *R/R aggravated GBH without intent* (188 offences in 2010/11) and *ABH* (2,982 offences in 2010/11) into one.

Cruelty to children

This proposal merges two existing classifications (*Cruelty and neglect of children* and *Abandoning a child under 2 years of age*) relating to cruelty and neglect together into one. Whilst around 6,000 such crimes are recorded annually less than 0.25% have related to the abandonment classification in the last two years.

Racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage

This proposal would amalgamate the four current racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage classifications (currently disaggregated according to the type of property damaged) and merge them into one. It is proposed that the disaggregation by property type would remain for the principle offence of criminal damage. In 2010/11 2,578 such crimes were recorded separated fairly evenly between the four disaggregated classifications. A total of over 700,000 crimes of criminal damage were recorded with such aggravated offences accounting for less than 0.5%.

Other offences against the State or public order

This looks to merge five existing classifications dealing with state (non-victim) based offences. Two of these (*Treason* and *Treason Felony*) have seen no crimes recorded for several years with another (*Riot*) with only four crimes between 2008/09 and 2010/11. The general *Other offences against the State and public order* classification has seen between 35,000 and 37,000 crimes recorded annually over the last 5 years.

³ This classification is also labelled '*Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life*' and includes a small number of endangering life offences that should not result in any actual injury.

⁴ See discussion in box 2.1 of Crime in England & Wales 2008/09 ([Walker, et. al](#), 2009) and the HMIC report 'Crime Counts' ([HMIC](#), 2009)

Other offences

This proposes merging eleven existing classifications into the overall *Other offences* classification. These offences cover matters now in the main dealt with by agencies other than the Police (for example immigration offences largely dealt with entirely by the UK Border Agency and planning law offences dealt with by Local Authorities). Where offences are dealt with by other agencies they generally do not come to notice of the Police and thus fall outside Police Recorded Crime.

CHANGES TO PRESENTATION OF POLICE RECORDED CRIME STATISTICS

Currently recorded crime statistics are released quarterly alongside findings from the British Crime Survey (BCS). An extensive annual publication in July includes detailed breakdowns at the level of data collection while the quarterly releases present figures for high level categories only. Commentary in the bulletins also focuses on trends in these categories. This section sets out proposals for how the categories might be revised to better suit the needs of a general audience. It is envisioned that lower level data will continue to be made available at least on an annual basis⁵.

The proposals would introduce a clearer split between 'victim-based' and 'state-based' offences. The resulting high-level categories would have greater coherence as collections of offences that are either mainly recorded as a result of a victim report ('victim-based') or mainly recorded as a result of proactive enforcement by the authorities ('state-based'). For violence, in particular, the changes would also more closely align recorded crime definitions with those used for the BCS. These proposals would also bring consistency with other presentations of official statistics on crime, for example for the monitoring of recorded crime trends by the Home Office⁶ and HMIC⁷.

Table 2 shows those offence classifications which would move to different high level categories under these proposals. The detailed tables at Annex A show these changes in the context of the suite of all recorded crime classifications and categories.

⁵ Future publication arrangements are a matter for the Office of National Statistics which will take over responsibility for publication of crime statistics from April 2012.

⁶ The Home Office 'Impact measure' (see the [Home Office business plan](#)) of crime rates is designed to focus on victim-based crimes and conforms to the summation of the violence, sexual offences, burglary, robbery, vehicle crime, other theft and criminal damage categories as proposed here.

⁷ As part of their routine monitoring work HMIC consider victim-based crime categories distinct from state-based categories associated with enforcement activity. A forthcoming public-facing HMIC website will take a similar approach when presenting recorded crime data.

Table 2 Proposed changes to high level categories used for reporting in of police recorded crime figures National Statistics publications

Victim-based offences		
Offence⁸	Moved from	Moved to
Kidnapping (36)	Other miscellaneous	Violence (without injury)
Blackmail (35)		Other theft

State-based offences		
Offence	Moved from	Moved to
Public order offences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public fear, alarm or distress (9A) ▪ Racially or religiously aggravated public fear, alarm or distress (9B) 	Violence against the person (without injury)	Other miscellaneous
Possession of weapons offences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possession of weapons (8B) ▪ Possession of firearms with intent (10A) ▪ Possession of other weapons (10C) ▪ Possession of article with blade or point (10D) 		
Handling stolen goods (54)	Other theft	
Profiting from or concealing knowledge of the proceeds of crime (38)		
Threat or possession with intent to commit criminal damage (59)	Criminal damage	
Prostitution related offences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exploitation of prostitution (24) ▪ Soliciting for the purpose of prostitution (27) 	Sexual offences (other)	

Kidnapping (36)

To be moved to *Violence (without injury)* from *Other miscellaneous*.

Kidnapping offences include infringement on the personal liberty of an individual. These offences have a closer fit with other victim-based violent crimes than with the variety of state based offences within ‘Other’.

Blackmail (35)

To be moved to *Other theft* from *Other miscellaneous*.

Blackmail is defined in the Theft Act 1968 and involves an individual acting ‘with a view to gain for himself or another or with intent to cause loss to another’. It has a closer fit with other victim-based acquisitive crimes than with the variety of state based offences within ‘Other’.

Public fear, alarm or distress (9A and 9B)

To be moved to *Other miscellaneous* from *Violence against the person (without injury)*.

Classifications 9A and 9B include offences under sections 4, 4A and 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. These offences cover circumstances where an offender is behaving in a way that causes or would be likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress. These classifications would not be used in any circumstances where physical violence is used (or attempted) against a victim. The classification may include some cases where violence is threatened, but the largest proportion will be accounted for by state based crimes recorded where the police have acted to restore public order where no individual victim has been identified.

⁸ Bracketed numbers indicate Home Office Counting Rules offence classification codes.

These offence classifications were created in 2008/09. Previously these public order offences were included in classifications (8C and 8E) that also included victim-based offences of harassment as set out in the Protection From Harassment Act 1997 (now recorded under classifications 8L and 8M). The public order offences are likely to have made up the majority of the old combined classifications, and it is proposed that these too are moved to *Other miscellaneous*.

Moving these classifications will create a break in the time series at 2008/09 for the offence categories of *Violence (without injury)* and *Other miscellaneous*. However, it will be possible to present uninterrupted time series for these categories excluding the affected classifications and for a proxy measure combining both victim-based and public order offences (see tables at annex A).

Possession of weapons offences (8B, 10A, 10C and 10D)

To be moved to *Other miscellaneous* from *Violence against the person (without injury)*.

These classifications only cover state-based offences. Any circumstances in which a weapon has been used against a victim would be covered by other relevant victim-based offences. Moving these offences to 'Other miscellaneous' will also place them alongside other non-violent weapons offences (i.e. offence classifications 10B, 81 and 90).

Note that historic offence code 8B was discontinued in 2008/09, with the relevant offences now coded under one of the classifications 10A, 10C or 10D.

Handling stolen goods (54)

Profiting from or concealing knowledge of the proceeds of crime (38)

To be moved to *Other miscellaneous* from *Other theft*.

These state-based offences are generally recorded through police activity to disrupt criminality. Where a victim of a precursor crime (for example, theft) is identified, that offence will be separately recorded under a victim-based classification.

Threat or possession with intent to commit criminal damage (59)

To be moved to *Other miscellaneous* from *Criminal damage*.

This offence classification will largely be recorded as a result of police activity to disrupt criminality (for example, where an individual is caught with cans of spray paint with intent to spray graffiti). However, the classification will also include some offences where an individual has been threatened that their property would be damaged.

Exploitation of prostitution (24)

Soliciting for the purpose of prostitution (27)

To be moved to *Other miscellaneous* from *Sexual offences*.

These offences are generally recorded as a result of police activity to disrupt criminality. Offences involving exploitation without consent or other more serious sexual offences would continue to be recorded under the relevant victim-based classification (for example, *Trafficking for sexual exploitation* (72) and *Abuse of children through prostitution and pornography* (71) which will remain in the *Most serious sexual offences* category).

Endangering life classifications

If the proposals for changes to data collection set out earlier in this paper are adopted then a range of current endangering life classifications will in future be recorded under a single offence code. Currently some of these are allocated to the *Violence against the person with injury* category while others are within the *without injury* category (see Table 3). A decision needs to be taken as to where the new classification should be allocated. For consistency the historical classifications should also be moved to the same category.

Table 3 Endangering life offence classifications

Further changes within Violence against the person category (to be renamed 'Violence')	
Offence	Current category
Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life (5A) - endangering life offences	Violence against the person (with injury)
Use of substance or object to endanger life (5B)	
Possession of items to endanger life (5C)	
Endangering railway passengers (6)	Violence against the person (without injury)
Endangering life at sea (7)	

Endangering life offences generally do not involve any injury and would not include any incidents where injuries are *'specific and intended'* (offences involving specific and intended injury would be recorded under another relevant classification). As such it's proposed that the new offence classification be allocated to *Violence without injury*.

It will not be possible to recode all historical endangering life offences recorded under the offence classification of *Wounding or carrying out an act endangering life (5A)*. Therefore, these proposals would introduce some discontinuity in the time series for *Violence with/without injury*. In practice the effect of this will be very small, as the endangering life offences will make up only a small minority of the overall classification 5A. It will still be possible to construct an uninterrupted time series for the proxy measure of *'Wounding or endangering life'* (see table at annex A).

Burglary, Robbery, Vehicle crime, Drug offences

No changes are proposed for these categories.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

For Data producers (Police)

1. Do you support these proposals either in whole or in part?
2. Subject to a decision being made by 31st January 2012 could you implement them for April 2012?
3. To what extent do you consider they will contribute to reductions in the burden associated with crime recording?
4. Do you have any further suggestions or proposals for consideration by the Independent Advisory Committee?

For Data Users

5. Do you support these proposals either in whole or in part?
6. Do you agree that these proposals would bring greater coherence to official statistics on crimes?
7. Will these proposals aid public understanding of crime statistics?
8. What if any impact will the loss of detailed collection associated with these proposals have on you or your organisation?
9. Do you have any further suggestions or proposals for consideration by the Independent Advisory Committee?

Responses to this consultation should be sent to the address below (by post or email) by 12 January 2012. A paper summarising early responses will be prepared for the first meeting of the Independent Advisory Committee. All responses will be made available to the Committee and individual responses may be published unless respondents request anonymity.

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