Presentational changes to National Statistics on police recorded crime in England and Wales

A closer look at changes to classifications used to present police recorded crime implemented in ‘Crime in England and Wales, year ending March 2013’

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Introduction and background

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have re-designed the classifications used to present police recorded crime statistics to provide a more coherent and consistent set of offence categories and a clearer picture for users.

This follows the National Statistician’s review of Crime Statistics in England and Wales in June 2011 which included recommendations for improving the presentation of crime statistics to give users and the public a clearer understanding of the overall picture of crime.

Changes have been developed in response to feedback received through consulting with users of crime statistics through focus groups and a public consultation. Throughout the process, advice and views were sought from the Crime Statistics Advisory Committee. The changes take in to account the importance of aligning with other publicly available sources of crime data, for example the Police.uk street level mapping and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) crime and policing comparator tools, and the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), and maintaining a consistent time series to provide clear historical context to latest figures.

The changes to classifications used to present police recorded crime statistics have been implemented in ‘Crime in England and Wales, year ending March 2013’, published on 18 July 2013. This methodological note has been published alongside this publication to provide more detail on the changes and to explain their impact on time-series for key measures.

There has been no change to the coverage of offences in the police recorded crime series and most changes are presentational, with some offences moving between classifications or being separated out of existing groupings. At the same time, there has been a transfer of responsibility for the recording of fraud offences from individual police forces to Action Fraud who will in future record fraud offences centrally. We have taken steps to address this change in the functional organisation of recording alongside the changes made to classifications.

Some minor changes to CSEW classifications were also developed through the consultation with users. These will be implemented in January 2014 alongside additional methodological changes to the weighting of the survey data and revisions to population estimates following the completion of the 2011 Census. See Annex 3 for more details.

The full public consultation, which includes details of the planned changes to the presentation of police recorded crime and a summary of responses, is available here: ‘Future dissemination strategy for the publication of National Statistics on Crime in England and Wales’.
Summary of main changes

Changes can broadly be divided in to those that:

• seek to inform the public debate on crime and respond to the wishes of users
• aim to improve public understanding of crime statistics, and;
• are designed to improve the coherence of police recorded crime with other crime data, including the Police.uk street level mapping HMIC crime and policing comparator tools.

Changes made to inform the public debate on crime and wishes of users

• Displaying ‘Homicide’ as a separate sub-category within ‘Violence against the person’. Previously, ‘Violence against the person’ was shown as 2 sub-categories: ‘Violence against the person – with injury’ and ‘Violence against the person – without injury’. The ‘Violence against the person’ category will now be shown as 3 sub-categories: ‘Homicide’, ‘Violence with injury’ and ‘Violence without injury’. ‘Homicide’ will now be shown as a separate sub-category in response to user demand and the high level of public interest in trends in these offences. This will have some impact on the number of offences in the ‘Violence – with injury’ category, but this will be minimal due to the relatively small number of homicides recorded each year.

• Displaying ‘Rape’ as a separate sub-category within ‘Sexual offences’. Previously, ‘Sexual offences’ were split in to ‘Most serious sexual crime’ (for example rape and sexual assault), and ‘Other sexual offences’ (for example exposure and voyeurism, and other miscellaneous sexual offences). ‘Sexual offences’ will now be sub-categorised as ‘Rape’ and ‘Other sexual offences’. Rape will be shown as a separate sub-category in response to user feedback and the high level of public interest in trends in this crime.

Changes designed to improve public understanding of crime statistics

• Separating ‘Victim-based crime’ from other crimes and fraud (see below).

• Moving selected offences in to different groups to better reflect the nature of the offences. For example, some offences relating to the possession of weapons and the offence of ‘Public fear, alarm or distress’, where there is no specific identifiable victim, will be moved from ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ to new, more appropriate, sub-categories within ‘Other crimes against society’ named ‘Possessions of weapons offences’ and ‘Public order offences’.

• Introducing a new high-level categorisation of ‘Theft offences’. This helps to present a clearer picture for users by grouping similar offences of burglary, vehicle offences, theft from the person, bicycle theft, shoplifting and all other theft offences.

• Separating out the high volume, well-known crimes of ‘Shoplifting’, ‘Theft from the person’ and ‘Bicycle theft’ from ‘Other theft offences’, rather than the existing arrangement where they are categorised within ‘Other theft offences’, to present a clearer picture for users.
• Splitting the ‘Other miscellaneous’ category in to ‘Possession of weapons offences’, ‘Public order offences’ and ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’ to provide a clearer picture of the types of crimes within each category.

**Changes made to improve the coherence of police recorded crime with other sources**

• Organising the presentation of police recorded crime under 3 broad categories: ‘Victim-based crime’, ‘Other crimes against society’ and ‘Fraud’. Police recorded crime will be divided between three broad categories to distinguish between crimes with a specific identifiable victim (referred to as ‘Victim-based crime’), those which do not normally have an immediate direct victim and are more likely to be recorded as a result of proactive enforcement by the police and other authorities (referred to as ‘Other crimes against society’), and ‘Fraud offences’ (see below for more detail).

These categories have been introduced to improve clarity of presentation and will help align police recorded crime figures with other crime reporting outputs such as the Police.uk street level mapping and HMIC crime and policing comparator tools. The ‘Victim-based crime’ category will also be broadly more comparable with crime measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales which provides estimates of victim-based crime only.

A detailed description of each change is included in the consultation papers, available here: 'Future dissemination strategy for the publication of National Statistics on Crime in England and Wales'.
Distribution of offences across categories

While the coverage of offences in the police recorded crime series has not changed, the movement of some offences means that some category totals have changed. For all categories, a back-series has been created so that long-term trends are consistent from 2002/03. This was when the National Crime Recording Standard was introduced and from when police recorded crime figures are considered comparable.

Victim based crime

Police recorded crime will be divided between categories to distinguish between crimes with a specific identifiable victim (referred to as ‘Victim-based crime’) and those which do not normally have a direct victim and are more likely to be recorded as a result of proactive enforcement by the police and other authorities (referred to as ‘Other crimes against society’). These have been introduced to improve clarity of presentation and comparability with data from the CSEW and will help align police recorded crime figures with other crime reporting tools, for example the Police.uk street level mapping and HMIC crime and policing comparator tools.

The victim-based crime category also provides better alignment with crime measured by the CSEW, which provides estimates of victim-based crime only. Important differences between the CSEW and police recorded crime remain, which mean that they are not directly comparable. For example the CSEW includes crimes that are not reported to or recorded by the police, but the police recorded crime series will also cover victims (e.g. businesses) not covered by the survey.

Examples of ‘Victim-based crimes’ include where an individual has been assaulted, a household has had property stolen or vandalised; or a business has experienced theft. Examples of ‘Other crimes against society’ include possession of drugs or weapons, or offences where there is ambiguity over offender/victim relationship (for example, in the case of affray, where there is a scuffle outside a pub or nightclub).

The trend in total police recorded crime is driven by trends in ‘Victim-based crimes’ due to the larger volume of offence in this category. The trend in ‘Other crimes against society’ over the past ten years has remained relatively flat, meaning that it contributed a higher proportion of offences to total police recorded crime in 2011/12 (12%) than it did in 2002/03 (7%) (Figure 1), as police recorded crime overall has fallen over that period.
Violence against the person

Previously, violence against the person had 2 sub-categories:

- ‘Violence against the person – with injury’, and;
- ‘Violence against the person – without injury’.

The violence against the person category will now be shown as 3 sub-categories:

- ‘Homicide’
- ‘Violence with injury’, and;
- ‘Violence without injury’.

**Homicide** will be shown as a separate sub-category in response to user feedback and the considerable public interest in this crime (although users will be warned to use caution when interpreting changes from quarter to quarter as numbers are small due to this being a rare event). To improve coherence, the offence of ‘**Corporate manslaughter**’ will be moved from ‘Violence against the person – with injury’ and included within the ‘Homicide’ category. There are only a handful of ‘Corporate manslaughter’ offences each year, so this change will have little impact on the totals for each category.
Some offences previously categorised as ‘Violence against the person’ that do not have a specific identifiable victim have been moved to more appropriate categories within the high-level group ‘Other crimes against society’. These include:

- **Possession of weapons offences** – moved to a new ‘Possession of weapons’ sub-category within ‘Other crimes against society’. These offences relate to licensing and ownership of weapons, i.e. where there was no violence involved at the time of the offence.

- **Offences causing public fear, alarm or distress** – moved to a new ‘Public order’ category within ‘Other crimes against society’. The majority of crimes recorded under this offence relate to verbal abuse or behaviour which causes fear or distress to another, rather than violence towards a specific identifiable victim. If the act escalated in to threats of violence, violence itself or harassment, it would be recorded under the appropriate offence within the violence category.

- **Offences associated with endangering life** have been moved from the ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ category to the ‘Violence against the person – with injury’ category to better reflect the nature of the offences. There are a few hundred offences of this type each year which means that this change has little impact on the trends in each category.

The re-categorisation of these offences brings the National Statistics definition of ‘Violence against the person’ in line with other publicly available sources of crime data such as the [Police.uk](http://Police.uk) street level mapping and [HMIC crime and policing crime comparator](https://www.hmic.gov.uk/staffordshire) tools.

The effect of changes to the ‘Violence against the person’ category is a decrease in the volume of offences of approximately 136,000 offences (18%) in 2011/12. However, the trend remains very similar with the overall rate of reduction changing from 10% (old basis) to 12% (new basis) respectively between 2002/03 and 2011/12 (Figure 2).
The trend in levels of ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ according to the old definition shows a marked decline since the peak in 2006/07, mainly due to downward trends in offences that have been moved to more appropriate categories (possession of weapons and public order offences). In contrast, levels according to the new definition are flat from 2005/06 (Figure 3). Despite the difference in the appearance of trends, the overall reduction from 2002/03 to 2011/12 is similar for the old and new definition of the category (down by 10% and 14% respectively).
Sexual offences

The category of ‘Sexual offences’ has been split into sub-categories of ‘Rape’ and ‘Other sexual offences’ in response to user feedback. This is a change from the existing sub-categories of ‘Most serious sexual crime’ and ‘Other sexual offences’ but does not affect the total number of offences recorded within the overall ‘Sexual offences’ category.

Offences of ‘Exploitation of prostitution’ and ‘Soliciting for the purposes of prostitution’ have been moved out of ‘Sexual offences’ and into ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’ in the ‘Other crimes against society’ category. These are low-volume offences (1,000 to 2,000 offences per year) and their re-categorisation has little effect on the long-term trends in each category.

Theft offences

A new high-level categorisation of ‘Theft offences’ has been introduced to help present a clearer picture by grouping similar offences. This will also give better alignment with the theft offences group for CSEW data when implemented.

Within this group are offences of burglary, vehicle offences, theft from the person, bicycle theft, shoplifting and all other theft offences.

Offences of theft from the person, bicycle theft and shoplifting will now be shown as separate sub-categories of ‘Theft offences’ rather than the existing arrangement where they are categorised within ‘Other theft offences’ to present a clearer picture for users.
The re-classified category of ‘All other theft offences’ (without theft from the person, shoplifting or bicycle theft) has an almost identical trend as the original category, albeit at around half the volume. There were year-on-year decreases to 2009/10, after which they increased each year to 2011/12 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Trends in police recorded other theft offences, 2002/03 to 2011/12**

Historically, the offence of making off without payment (e.g. driving off from a petrol station or running out of a restaurant or taxi without paying), whilst being a crime defined in the theft legislation, has been included within the Fraud and forgery’ category. This crime type is not being recorded by NFIB and will continue to be recorded by police and reported in future within ‘Theft offences’.

**Criminal damage and arson**

The name of this category has been expanded to emphasise the inclusion of arson offences within the criminal damage category. The total number of offences recorded under this category remains the same as the former ‘Criminal damage’ category. The majority of offences within ‘Criminal damage and arson’ fall in to the criminal damage sub-category (96% in 2011/12).

**Other crimes against society**

This high-level category was introduced to separate out crimes which do not normally have a specific identifiable victim. Trends in such offences can reflect changes in police activity rather than in levels of criminality. ‘Other crimes against society’ comprises categories of ‘Drug offences’, ‘Possession of weapons’ ‘Public order’ and ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’.

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Methodological note
Offences recorded in the latter three categories were previously grouped under the broad heading of ‘Other miscellaneous offences’ (and some possession of weapons offences under ‘Violence against the person’); they have been separated out to provide a clearer picture. Several offences have also been moved from ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ to these categories to better reflect the nature of the offences. For example, ‘Public fear, alarm or distress’ and offences related to the possession of weapons (where there is no immediate direct victim) were previously classified as ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ and have been moved to new categories of ‘Public order offences’ and ‘Possession of weapons offences’. More detail on the categories within ‘Other crimes against society’ can be found in the relevant sections below.

Trends in ‘Other crimes against society’ have remained relatively flat since 2002/03 at around 400,000 to 500,000 offences per year. In comparison, the volume of ‘Victim-based crime’ has fallen by 37% over the same period. This means that the proportion of ‘Other crimes against society’ contributing to total police recorded crime has increased over this period, from 7% in 2002/03 to 12% in 2011/12.

**Drug offences**

To provide clarity, this category has been sub-divided in to ‘Trafficking of drugs’ and ‘Possession of drugs’. The total number of drug offences recorded under this category will remain the same.

**Possession of weapons offences**

This is a new category comprising weapons offences moved from the ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ category and former ‘Other miscellaneous offences’ category. It includes weapons offences related to possession and licensing, rather than offences where there is a direct victim. Any circumstances in which a weapon has been used against a victim would be covered by other relevant victim based offences (e.g. actual bodily harm). The trend in possession of weapons offences shows offences peaking in 2004/05, at 40,000 offences, after which there were year-on-year falls to 2011/12 (Figure 5).
Public order offences

The offences in this new category included within ‘Other crimes against society’ comprise ‘Public fear, alarm or distress’, ‘Violent disorder’ and ‘Other offences against the state or public order’. These categories cover offences where an offender is behaving in a way that causes or would be likely to cause fear, alarm, distress or disorder, and also incidents of affray and being drunk or disorderly. They would not generally include offences where physical violence is used (or attempted) against a victim, though the category may include some offences where violence is threatened.

The majority of public order offences fall within the public fear, alarm or distress category (64% in 2011/12). Trends show levels peaking in 2006/07, driving the overall trend in this category. Levels in the remainder of offences within ‘Public order’ have remained comparatively flat since 2002/03 (Figure 6).
Prior to 2008/09, ‘Public fear, alarm or distress’ was combined with the offence of ‘Harassment’ within the ‘Violence against the person – without injury’ category. Whilst the offence of ‘Public fear, alarm or distress’ is moving to a ‘Public order’ category, harassment is staying in the ‘Violence – without injury category’. In order to produce a consistent time series for violent and public order offences, offences for 2002/03 to 2007/08 have been apportioned between the two categories based on 2008/09 data. Going forward, police forces will be invited to submit a breakdown of these offences for the affected years. See Section 3.3 of the User Guide for more details.

**Miscellaneous crimes against society**

Traditionally, the ‘Other miscellaneous offences’ section was a catch-all group of offences that did not easily fit in to any other category. This category has now been split in to ‘Possession of weapons offences’, ‘Public order offences’ and ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’ to provide users with a clearer picture of the offences in each category.

This change results in there being fewer offences in the new ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’ category compared with the former ‘Other miscellaneous offences’ category (approximately 15,000 fewer in 2011/12).
Fraud offences

Changes to the operational arrangements for the reporting and recording of fraud offences mean that, from April 2013, many fraud offences previously recorded by police forces will be recorded centrally by Action Fraud, a public facing national reporting centre. Action Fraud records incidents of fraud and internet crime directly from the public and organisations, and was created to provide support and prevention advice to victims and to enable a co-ordinated approach to analysing and tackling fraud and internet crime and to help make the UK’s cyber space safer and more secure. Thus the future recording of fraud will be similar to arrangements with regard to the recording of crimes on Britain’s rail network which is done centrally by British Transport Police and do not appear in individual police force area figures.

The ONS consultation on the presentation of police recorded crime classifications initially focused on introducing categories of ‘Victim-based crime’ and ‘Other crimes against society’, removing fraud from police recorded crime figures and displaying figures from Action Fraud separately. However, further reflection and discussion with a range of users has led us to adjust our original proposals and to include ‘Fraud offences’ as a separate standalone category in addition to ‘Victim-based crime’ and ‘Other crimes against society’.

Totals for police recorded crime will be shown including and excluding fraud offences (See Annex 1 in the methodological note tables). The headline total police recorded crime figure for England and Wales will include fraud offences; those recorded by the police from 2002/03 to 2012/13 and by Action Fraud from 2011/12 (in 2011/12 there was an overlap where Action fraud had taken over responsibility for recording fraud offences from 5 police forces with a further overlap in 2012/13 as all remaining forces then migrated on a rolling basis during the year). The central recording of fraud offences means that police recorded crime shown by police force area level will not include fraud offences.

Previously police recorded forgery offences were presented alongside fraud offences. Forgery offences will continue to be recorded by the police and will be displayed in the ‘Miscellaneous crimes against society’ category.

Historically, the offence of making off without payment (e.g. driving off from a petrol station or running out of a restaurant or taxi without paying), whilst being a crime defined in the theft legislation, has been included within the ‘Fraud and forgery’ category. This crime type is not being recorded by Action Fraud and will continue to be recorded by police and reported in future within ‘Theft offences’. See Annex 3 for more details.
Annexes

Annex 1: Table A4 Police recorded crime by offence, 2002/03 to 2011/12 (new presentation)

Annex 2: Table A4 Police recorded crime by offence, 2002/03 to 2011/12 (original presentation)

Annex 3: Additional forthcoming changes resulting from consulting on the Future dissemination strategy for the publication of National Statistics on Crime in England and Wales

Police recorded crime – ‘Making off without payment’

A further change to the ‘Theft offences’ category yet to be implemented is the introduction of a new offence classification of ‘Making off without payment’. Crimes recorded under this offence previously came under ‘Preserved other fraud and repealed fraud offences’ within the Fraud and Forgery category and account for around 50,000 offences per year. Whilst responsibility for recording the fraud component of this offence has moved to Action Fraud, the theft element will continue to be recorded by police forces and ‘Making off without payment’ will be shown as a separately identifiable offence within the ‘All other theft offences’ category. Recording of this offence began in April 2013, so the first offences will be shown in the Crime in England and Wales, year ending June 2013 quarterly bulletin. Overall counts will not be affected as offences are moving from one category to another.

Crime Survey for England and Wales

Some minor changes to CSEW classifications were also developed alongside changes to the presentation of police recorded crime classifications through consultation with users. These will be implemented in January 2014 alongside additional methodological changes to the weighting of the survey data and revisions to population estimates following the completion of the 2011 Census. They include:

- **Moving away from headline categories of ‘Household crime’ and ‘Personal crime’ to categories based on more specific crime types.** Instead, crime categories will be used to group CSEW offences. This approach moves towards the approach taken presenting police recorded crime and means that there will be a consistent labelling method for the 2 series.

- **Changes to the presentation of some theft offences.** The new presentation will clearly show how category totals are defined. The introduction of a ‘Theft offences’ category will provide consistency with the police recorded crime series.

- **Moving robbery out of violence into a separate standalone category.** Previously, robbery was categorised within CSEW violence. By presenting it as a standalone category, there is coherence with the presentation of police recorded crime offences.