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## **Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports**

**Bedfordshire Police  
January 2012**

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest. We monitor, inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of the police service in England and Wales. More information and copies of inspection and review reports are available on our website, [www.hmic.gov.uk](http://www.hmic.gov.uk).

## The process for recording crimes and incidents

The crime recording process has three key stages:

- **Recording an incident:** A member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime. The police create an incident record.
- **Recording a crime:** If the police decide a crime was committed, they create a crime record (usually straight away).
- **Investigating a crime:** Investigations begin as soon as possible, usually with initial enquiries which look for possible leads and gather evidence (a 'primary investigation'). A more detailed, 'secondary investigation' then takes place to consider the evidence gathered in the initial stages.

## Purpose of the review

The Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice, Nick Herbert, asked HMIC to inspect the quality of the crime and incident data collected by police forces across England and Wales.

## Why is it important to have high quality crime and incident data?

High quality data means that:

- The police can establish the extent, location and victims of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and so plan their work to achieve the best outcomes for victims and their communities;
- The public, the Government and HMIC can get an accurate picture of crime and ASB in a particular area, and judge whether their force's performance represents value for money.

The Government's commitment to public accountability and transparency adds to this need for accurate and consistent data. This will become increasingly important as oversight of the police service is moved away from Whitehall to local police and crime commissioners (PCCs), who will rely on accurate, local information on how well their force is performing.

## Who sets the standards for crime and incident recording?

The Home Office sets standards for both crime and incident recording. The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) is underpinned by the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR). These aim to provide consistent standards in all forces and an approach to recording crimes that is based on the needs of the victim.

## **Review methodology: a note on data collection**

HMIC checked the accuracy of a small number of the force's crime and incident records. This was used to flag up any potential issues which could usefully be explored during the review.

Although the sample size was not large enough to be statistically significant, it gives some indication of the quality of the data collected by the force, and of the efficiency of its systems and processes. Some findings from the data collection are therefore included below.

## **Findings for Bedfordshire Police**

### **Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?**

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Bedfordshire Police, as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 401 calls that the force typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator as to how accurately crime is being recorded. We found that nine records had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this indicates that on the whole crimes in Bedfordshire are recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

However, we found that there was sometimes an unacceptable delay between a victim reporting a burglary, robbery or rape and the force recording this as a crime. The national guidance is clear that crimes should be recorded as soon as possible and in any case within 72 hours.

### **What is the quality of the investigation and service to victims?**

The force had recently published clear guidance to staff on how to record crimes and incidents. Investigations were well supervised to make sure they were on track, particularly when the crimes are more serious. However, we found that supervisors did not always record their comments or updates on less serious cases, which makes it difficult to assess whether they are doing a good job.

Improvements are needed to the processes used by the force for identifying vulnerable and repeat victims (such as those who are disabled or elderly) so they can be given extra support if needed. However, chief officers recognise this issue and are taking steps to address it. Victims of crime and ASB are updated on the progress of their case as often as they request and in their preferred way. Staff recognise the importance of keeping victims updated.

### **How does the force ensure that standards are met?**

Chief officers clearly accept that the quality of data recorded by the force is their responsibility. Regular checks are carried out to review the quality of crime and incident reports; however, the results of the checking process are not always translated into action that will lead to improvement.

At the time of inspection, a new quality assurance role had recently been created to review and improve the quality of incident and crime records in the Call Management Centre and Central Information Bureau (where most crime is recorded).

Staff taking the initial calls know how crime and incidents should be recorded to ensure that police officers responding to the calls for assistance have access to the sound information that they need to carry out their investigation.

## **Conclusions**

Senior managers in Bedfordshire Police recognise the issues that HMIC have highlighted in this review. They are taking active steps to ensure that the quality of crime and incident recording improves.

The force had plans, policies and strategies to assist staff with recording reported crime and incident data. However, these are not always applied consistently, which means that victims' accounts of what has happened to them is not always recorded accurately. Staff have been trained in respect of their responsibilities to secure quality information and understand that they need to do this well. Checks are in place to identify any issues in relation to the quality of information recorded; however, more could be done to act on the findings of these checks.