



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Cambridgeshire Constabulary
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.

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 Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 119 incident records created by Cambridgeshire Constabulary as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 617 calls that the Constabulary typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator as to how accurately crime is being recorded. Three of these calls for assistance had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that Cambridgeshire Constabulary almost always records crimes accurately as required by the crime recording standards.

We found that the Constabulary has a comprehensive process in place for checking that incidents are recorded correctly. This is championed by an Assistant Chief Constable with the backing of the other members of the Chief Officer team. The process requires a full account to be recorded for every crime, to make it easy to see whether or not it had been recorded and categorised correctly. However, sexual offences are not always recorded to the 72-hour deadline required by national guidelines.

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

The quality of investigations is good. The Constabulary had clear guidance for staff that sets out minimum expectations for investigations.

HMIC found that contact between staff and victims of crime is generally of a very good standard. However, we found that victims were not always told that the initial investigation had been completed and that no further investigation would be undertaken. The Constabulary could also improve the recording of incidents reported other than by telephone (such as by e-mail) and how it identifies vulnerable victims, such as those who are disabled or elderly, so they can be given extra support if needed.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Cambridgeshire Constabulary has a well-established programme in place for checking the quality of its incident and crime information. This work is undertaken by staff with the right skills and supported by local teams who are responsible for crime and incident recording.

However, improvements could be made in the way Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Police Authority monitor the findings from audits to ensure that they have a better understanding of where improvements could be made.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that Cambridgeshire Constabulary almost always records crimes accurately as required by the crime recording standards. These standards are championed at chief officer level, and supported by comprehensive plans, policies and strategies. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in this area, and quality assurance processes identify any issues to be rectified.

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