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in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Cheshire 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 Cheshire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Cheshire Constabulary. None had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which is excellent performance and indicates that crimes in Cheshire are recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

Cheshire Constabulary's good level of compliance with the NCRS is achieved through robust quality control by the Force Crime Registrar (FCR), staff in the call handling centre, the central crime recording desk, and customer service desks. Reporting directly to a chief officer, the FCR is the final arbiter for disputes over how the HOCR should be applied, and is supported by specialist staff who are situated in divisional customer service desks.

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

HMIC found bespoke minimum standards in place around how crimes should be investigated, aimed at ensuring that staff maximise opportunities to bring offenders to justice and follow best practice. The Constabulary's contact with victims was generally good, and this was supported by the force IT systems. Staff should, however, record more regularly when a supervisor had directed an investigation, so that there is a better audit trail of the oversight of each investigation. HMIC also found that supervisors' understanding of the NCRS varied; the Constabulary should address this.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Cheshire Constabulary had a strong and proportionate approach to auditing and quality assurance of crime data. Audit 'themes' and issues arising were addressed through the Constabulary's performance management framework.

However, the Constabulary did not audit incident data as strongly as it did crime data; this needs to be addressed.

Conclusions

Arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of crime data are strong, and there are helpful plans, policies and strategies in place to help achieve this. The Constabulary has high standards when recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner so that they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims. Staff responsibilities and skills are well established to help secure incident and crime data quality. There are sound audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify issues and take action in respect of crime data. However, arrangements in respect of incident data need to be strengthened to match those of crime data.

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ISBN: 978-1-84987-636-0
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