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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**City of London 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.

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 the City of London Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by City of London Police. Six had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, indicating that crimes in the City of London are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

We found that the City of London Police efficiently recorded and classified reports of crimes. The Wards Policing Teams ensured all reports of crimes were captured from local communities; the recent merging of the force's Crime Information Bureau and Crime Desk was expected to further improve the collection and management of crimes. However, it was sometimes difficult for officers to phone in reports of crimes as they happened, which meant they had to return to the police stations to record them there.

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

Standards of crime records in the force were found to be high, with staff recording comprehensive summaries of investigations on almost all of the crime records we examined. While supervisors did not always log comments, they gave verbal direction to investigators. This gives some assurance that investigations are being properly supervised, although actual levels of supervision could not be clearly seen.

All the records we examined showed that the force maintained good contact with victims to keep them updated on the progress of their case.

The force had some way to go before restorative justice is used as an alternative to the courts system, but was developing this.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Senior officers in the force were clearly committed to maintaining high standards of crime recording, and this was well supported by the Police Committee. The force conducts comprehensive crime and incident audit programmes, the results of which are presented at regular crime performance meetings. This means the force can have confidence in the crime figures it produces.

There is a strong quality assurance regime in place from the beginning to the end of the crime and incident recording process. However, this could be considered stifling as it removes the focus from staff getting it right first time. They know mistakes will be picked up and corrected later in the process.

Conclusions

The force had good leadership and governance arrangements in place to secure crime and incident data of satisfactory quality. Helpful policies and strategies provided staff with guidance to help them achieve this. Intrusive systems and processes meant the force recorded crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner; the service they provide to victims of crime is particularly good.

We found that staff responsible for checking crime and incident data quality were well trained and had strong technical knowledge of the HOCR. There were sound audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify issues and take meaningful action to address them.

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