



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Cumbria 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 Cumbria Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 115 incidents logged by Cumbria Constabulary. Five had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in Cumbria were generally recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

There was clear leadership on crime and incident data quality in Cumbria, for which both the force and police authority are held accountable. The Force Crime Registrar (FCR), and staff in the call handling centre, communication helpdesks, and local crime management units were clearly responsible for data quality. They fulfilled this by conducting regular audits and checking for accuracy as cases progressed.

The way the Constabulary recorded crime and incident data was compliant with the NCRS and the National Standard of Incident Recording (NSIR); they were supported in this by useful IT systems. The Constabulary, however, needs to publish minimum standards for data quality, which will increase the involvement of supervisors in the crime and incident data recording process.

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

The Constabulary had adequate policies and standards for crime investigation, which were available to all staff. However, these policies require updating to include the adoption of new IT systems and the increased emphasis on the responsibilities of operational staff.

While the Constabulary's IT system assisted in crime recording and investigation, supervisors should record more detail in instances where they have directed an investigation. This would provide a better level of detail for audits and identify where improvements can be made.

The contact that Cumbria had with victims and the involvement of the Victim Support Service were good and, again, supported by the force IT systems.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The Chief Constable has made his commitment to accurate data clear to all staff, and the chief officer for specialist support takes responsibility for data quality. This is reinforced by the FCR and Force Incident Registrar (FIR) roles at force level, and by specialist staff in each local area. The Constabulary had strong audit arrangements for crime and incident data, which were carried out on areas identified to be the most problematic. The findings of these audits were published, but the staff responsible for acting upon them need to be held to account for improving performance.

Conclusions

There were strong arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data, and the Constabulary had adequate plans, policies and strategies in place. There were high standards when recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims). Staff's skills and awareness of their responsibilities in this area were well established. Audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify issues were sound, but improved accountability is needed around implementing actions that come out of audit findings.