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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Devon and Cornwall 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 Devon and Cornwall Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at a total of 120 incidents logged by Devon and Cornwall Police during the original inspection, and a further 120 on re-inspection.

On re-inspection, of the 120 incidents logged by Devon and Cornwall, seven had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, indicating that crimes in Devon and Cornwall are now being recorded more accurately and in accordance with the NCRS. The initial review indicated some cause for concern – specifically the under-recording of crime. However, HMIC acknowledges that the force has now identified the key issues, and put processes in place to address the areas of concern. This has increased confidence in the force crime data.

We found that compliance with the NCRS was very good once crimes had been recorded on the force IT system, and that this was supported by thorough policies. Functional systems made it possible for incidents and crimes to be recorded consistently and effectively, and included good levels of detail to assist in making decisions about how to proceed. Recently, crime management and recording practices had recently been radically re-engineered along a “right first time” approach; however, at the time of the initial inspection, considerable numbers of crimes and ASB incidents were not being correctly recorded.

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

At the time of the initial inspection, Devon and Cornwall Police were making significant and ambitious changes to their crime and incident reporting processes. These included introducing a much more streamlined approach to how they initially recorded crimes, which could improve the service they provide to the public.

We found the quality of investigations to be good overall, but contact with victims of crime (to keep them updated on the progress of their cases) needs improvement, as inconsistent practices were discovered. The force's assessment of victims to see if any should be identified as repeat or vulnerable (in order to get extra support if needed) and the management and recording of ASB were inconsistent – but both areas showed improvement on re-inspection.

Restorative justice approaches were developing well, with good staff training in place.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Most of the crime recording data we examined was good, but compliance in converting incidents to crimes (when the rules require) was not consistent on the initial inspection. There is strong force and police authority leadership around improving data quality and there are challenging targets, but some urgent refocus was required to turn this leadership into results, and there was good evidence of this on re-inspection.

The Force Crime Registrar has good chief officer support and excellent authority support, and is visibly independent from performance targets. The contact management staff (who initially investigate and record many crimes) have become critical, and there are some serious vulnerabilities still present. A wide-ranging audit regime is in place, completed by a small dedicated team demonstrating continuous improvement.

Conclusions

HMIC found arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data were limited, but are now strengthened, with adequate plans, policies and strategies now in place – the police authority has been active in driving improvements. There were, however, variable but clearly improving 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 skills and awareness of their responsibilities around crime and incident recording are still insufficiently established. There are sound audit and improved quality assurance processes in use to identify any issues and take action to address them.

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