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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Dorset 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 Dorset Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Dorset Police. Three had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in Dorset are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with NCRS.

HMIC found strong force leadership and commitment to improving data quality, evident over several years. This has created a healthy "compliance culture" in recording crimes and ASB. The records we examined showed excellent compliance with the NCRS and HOCA; this gives a high level of confidence in Dorset's crime statistics.

Both incidents and crimes were recorded consistently and effectively, on dated but functional systems. Good levels of detail were logged to assist decision making, and the crime and ASB reports accurately reflected the circumstances of the offence.

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

Initial investigations by contact management staff and police officers on the ground were of a good and consistent standard. Subsequent investigations were also good overall (although the minimum standards expected in these could be clearer); however, supervision was not proportionate to the offence and risk.

Staff did not make contacting victims of crime with updates on the progression of their case a priority, and this was not monitored effectively. Early identification of repeat and vulnerable ASB victims (so they can receive extra support) needed to improve: there was no means of flagging up such victims automatically, but new systems are being introduced.

Crime management practices although effective were overly bureaucratic and could lack victim focus. The force has recognised this and significant changes and investment are planned.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

There has been a strong force leadership focus on improving data integrity, and this was reflected in very good crime recording practices. The Force Crime Registrar had good support and was visibly independent from performance pressures.

The audit regime was fairly thorough, but repeat issues and risks identified in audits needed to be addressed more robustly, and there were no links to the force's performance regime.

Good training and quality control by the Contact Management Team, coupled with thorough checking by crime management staff helped achieve some very good standards. However, frontline staff need to improve their knowledge and understanding of the HOOCR.

Conclusions

HMIC found that arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data were strong, and there were helpful plans, policies and strategies in place to support them. Systems and processes for maintaining data quality were complex but effective, and staff applied consistent standards when recording crimes and incidents (so they reflect the sequence of events as described by victims).

Staff skills and awareness of their responsibilities around data quality were well established. The force audit regime was fairly thorough at identifying issues, but repeat issues needed to be addressed more robustly.