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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Essex 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 Essex Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Essex Police as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 3,287 calls that the force typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator as to how accurately crime is being recorded. Six of these calls for assistance had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that Essex Police almost always records crimes accurately as required by the crime recording standards.

The force has enough call takers available to meet demand, which means there is a very low rate of missed calls. Most records contain enough detail to ensure that the incident is correctly recorded. However, in some complex cases (for example allegations of rape) crimes are not always recorded in line with the 72-hour deadline required by national guidelines.

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

Essex Police provides clear guidance to staff on how investigations should be conducted. However, a new IT system has recently been introduced which is not always used to record the investigation plan, particularly for more serious cases. This makes it difficult for supervisors to direct the investigation of these cases. The force is working to make sure staff use the system correctly. The force generally contacts victims in a way that suits them. It is good at quickly identifying repeat and vulnerable victims, such as those who are disabled or elderly, so they can be given extra support if needed.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The force carries out regular checks on whether crimes are being recorded in line with national guidance. Findings from these checks are regularly reviewed; areas for improvement are identified and sent to local policing commanders, who are held to account for addressing them. Similarly, calls for assistance that did not involve a crime (including many cases of anti-social behaviour) are also audited, but not reviewed to the same degree as crime records. In the light of the forthcoming budget cuts, Essex Police has decided to reduce the number of audits it carries out. The impact this will have on the accuracy of crime recording in the future is not clearly understood by the force.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that Essex Police almost always records crimes accurately as required by the NCRS. Staff responsible for recording crime are skilled and have a high level of awareness as to their responsibilities. On occasions, however, they do not follow the guidance supplied in full. There is room for some improvement in the way crimes and incidents are recorded, for example ensuring that they reflect the sequence of events as described by victims. The force has processes in place to ensure that high standards of crime recording are maintained. Checks carried out in respect of calls for assistance relating to reports of anti-social behaviour could be further improved.

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