



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Gloucestershire 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 Gloucestershire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

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

Gloucestershire Constabulary's central Crime Validation Evaluation Unit (CVEU) receives crime reports from the Contact Management Department and from officers on the street, and aims to speed up the categorisation of crimes and incidents. The unit was also responsible for making sure that investigations take place as they should and that the correct staff carry them out.

The Constabulary has supplied staff with guidance on the various crime types that can be used when reporting offences. Most records contained a sufficiently detailed account to ensure that the incidents were correctly classified, but vulnerable and repeat victims were not automatically identified (so they can receive extra support if needed) by the force's IT system.

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

HMIC found that the Constabulary's IT system automatically reminded staff to offer various victim support services, and most of the crime reports HMIC sampled provided evidence that this service had been offered. Victims of crime were also regularly updated on the progress of their cases.

The Constabulary applied a 'Solvability Matrix' (which identifies crimes that have the highest chance of being detected) to focus its efforts on the most frequent crimes, and guidance on investigations was available to staff. However, crime enquiries were recorded in two separate ways, and the information was not cross-referenced between the two processes, meaning the full crime record was not readily accessible. In addition, sergeants did not always record their investigative plans within the Constabulary's crime recording system. The Constabulary aims to rectify this and provide more supervision to frontline staff.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

It was clear that chief officers were committed to and took responsibility for data quality, and that the CVEU carried out quality assurance checks of records.

All frontline staff received training around alternative methods of disposal, such as community resolutions and restorative justice, but not all staff knew enough about the HOCCR and NCRS.

The Force Information Auditor was the final arbiter for disputes about how the HOCCR should be applied, and regular audits were carried out to see that crimes were being recorded in line with NCRS. These audits, however, did not report on the underlying reasons for the issues they uncovered, or identify where improvements in processes could be made. The Constabulary is aware of this and was working to change the way it carries out audits.

Conclusions

HMIC found strong arrangements at a senior level for securing the quality of crime and incident data, and that there were adequate plans, policies and strategies in place. The Constabulary had variable standards when recording crime 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 around data quality were insufficiently established to help secure good quality incident and crime data. However, there were basic audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify any issues and take action to address them.

© HMIC 2012
ISBN: 978-1-84987-647-6
www.hmic.gov.uk