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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Gwent 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 Gwent Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Gwent Police. Seventeen had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crime recording in Gwent gives some cause for concern.

HMIC found evidence of accurate crime and incident recording, but this was not consistently the case across the force. Because the force does not have a clear crime-related incidents process, early reviews to determine whether a report had been classified correctly were not always carried out. This resulted in a number of the incidents we sampled for this review being inappropriately recorded.

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

HMIC found that the force carried out good investigations. There was evidence that it provided a high standard of care to victims and was good at automatically referring them to victim support – but this was not the case consistently across the force.

Because Gwent Police has separate command and control and record management systems, its ability to identify repeat and vulnerable victims (so they can receive extra support if needed) and link information between the two systems is significantly reduced. This has the potential to lower the quality of investigations and of service to victims. The level and standard of supervision of crimes and incidents was also inconsistent, and needs investment if the force is to deliver the standard of service required.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The way the force manages the most frequent crimes was being reviewed, led by the chief officer team. However, at the time of the review, there was no clear strategy to improve the quality of crime and incident data; this had contributed to inconsistent levels of supervision throughout the force. A newly-formed data quality forum was beginning to address areas of concern, but this was not being routinely monitored by chief officers. This reduced the force's ability to improve performance in this area. An absence of clear and consistent leadership and supervision from senior managers and support from the police authority (in relation to data quality) creates risks for the force.

The force plans to introduce a new IT system in Autumn 2012, which should substantially improve the force's ability to accurately record crimes and incidents, as well as increasing levels of supervision to ensure standards are improved.

Conclusions

The quality of crime and incident data would be significantly improved if there were greater clarity and focus from chief officers and the police authority on the importance of this issue. Whilst plans were being developed to improve the management of the most frequent crimes and the recording of crimes and incidents in the future, inconsistent approaches to classification and supervision had the potential to place victims at risk. Investment in training for supervisors, together with a strong audit and inspection programme which focuses on areas that require the most improvement, will significantly improve performance in this area. HMIC is confident that Gwent Police and Gwent Police Authority now have the leadership, capability and expertise to deliver the required changes.

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