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in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Hertfordshire 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 Hertfordshire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Hertfordshire Constabulary as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 2,200 calls that the Constabulary typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator of how accurately crime is being recorded. Seven had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that crimes in Hertfordshire Constabulary are nearly always recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

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

Hertfordshire Constabulary has a well thought through approach to maintaining high levels of data quality. Frontline police officers and staff are given clear guidance on crime recording and initial investigation. All crime is recorded centrally in the force communication room. Well-trained staff review all closed incident records to check that they have been dealt with properly. Staff showed a strong commitment to updating victims on the progress of their investigations. There are, however inconsistencies in the way that the force identifies repeat and vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour, such as those who are disabled or elderly, so they can be given extra support if needed. This represents a significant risk to the force and police authority.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Hertfordshire Constabulary's top team showed clear leadership on the importance of recording crime accurately, getting it 'right first time'. There is also clear oversight by the police authority. The force ensures that the staff involved in crime recording decisions have the right skills to do their job well. Supported by strong quality assurance arrangements, this helps to maintain good levels of crime and incident data quality.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that Hertfordshire Constabulary almost always records crimes accurately as required by the NCRS. Chief officers demonstrate strong leadership and reinforce the importance of accurate crime recording throughout the organisation. The oversight by the police authority is good. Overall the Constabulary is committed to ensuring good quality crime and incident data in Hertfordshire. Staff are experienced and their skills are supported by good, clear guidance. However, the Constabulary needs to address the risks that HMIC has identified relating to the inconsistent identification of repeat and vulnerable victims of anti-social behaviour.

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