



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Lancashire 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 Lancashire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

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

HMIC found that the Constabulary had good systems and processes in place to help its staff maintain high standards when recording incidents and crimes in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims). However, the Constabulary could improve the way it records crimes from incidents of ASB, and should work to ensure it places the same focus on correct recording of incidents as it does of crimes.

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

HMIC found Lancashire to be a generally high performing Constabulary, with a strong focus on overall quality of service and good levels of compliance with the NCRS. The Constabulary had adopted an approach focused on the needs of the victim, and had high standards in place around both investigations and its contact with victims to update them on the progress of their cases.

The Constabulary's systems and processes effectively helped staff record and manage incidents and crimes, but some staff needed refresher training on the HOCA and the NCRS.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The Constabulary's approach to delivering continuous improvement, known as Sustaining Excellence, was established in 2007, and so HMIC found strong and purposeful leadership on crime and incident data quality. Staff were clearly accountable to senior teams in the Constabulary and the police authority, and chief officers had put out clear messages about the need for ethical crime recording and a high quality of service.

The standing of the Crime and Incident Registrar was high, and the postholder was both effective and well-supported by a central audit and review team. The Constabulary had a strong approach to auditing and quality assurance in respect of crime recording and management, focusing on the areas that posed the most risk. A similar approach was not in place, however, for incident management: this needs to be addressed.

Conclusions

There were strong arrangements at a senior level for securing the quality of incident and crime data, with helpful plans, policies and strategies in place to support them. The Constabulary had high standards when recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims).

© HMIC 2012
ISBN: 978-1-84987-655-1
www.hmic.gov.uk