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## **Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports**

**Metropolitan Police Service  
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](http://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 the Metropolitan Police Service**

### **Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?**

HMIC looked at 244 incidents logged by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Thirty had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised. While in overall terms the MPS continues to improve its crime and incident data quality, this indicates that crime and ASB data recorded in London gives some cause for concern.

Other issues include the under-recording of ASB, which results from ineffective Call Handling System software: if this is to be addressed, there needs to be a clearer process, tighter result codes and improved compliance. At the time of the inspection, the Central Communications Command (CCC) was addressing this matter and has taken robust, targeted action when serious call-handling failures have been identified.

HMIC found that the finalisation of incidents was not always correctly transposed onto incident records, and the force's overall responsibility for NCRS compliance needs to be made clearer to staff. Pilot schemes running at Brent and Lambeth indicated significant potential to address this issue and to manage incidents more efficiently. The MPS also needs to develop a policy for crimes and anti-social behaviour which are not reported through the CCC (for example, those telephoned directly to neighbourhood policing staff).

CCC staff use a prompt to help them determine whether a caller is a 'repeat' or 'vulnerable' victim of crime or ASB (so they can receive extra support if needed), although the force should clarify what it defines as 'vulnerability'. Officers attending incidents used a new set of criteria to assess whether a victim was vulnerable; but the fact that a victim was repeat or vulnerable was not always recorded on incident logs, presenting a risk that call takers may not know that such identification has already been made.

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

The MPS has corporate and generic minimum standards for the investigation of crime, as well as bespoke standards for rape, child abuse and domestic violence cases, which help to improve the quality of investigations. Many boroughs have also developed local minimum standards for other priority crimes; these could usefully be incorporated within the corporate standards.

Virtually all reports of crime are routed through the boroughs where they occur, even if they are investigated by non-borough staff. The only exceptions to this are for murders, rapes and child abuse investigations, which are investigated by the Specialist Crime Directorate (SCD).

HMIC found strong supervision of crime investigations, and that the quality of primary and secondary investigations was very good. This was due to a rigorous use of minimum standards for investigation, proactive supervision (to make sure they stay on track), and the fact that staff are clearly held to account for ensuring that crimes are fully investigated and detected.

There was evidence of regular contact with victims of crime (to update them on the progress of their cases), but this is not reflected in the results of the British Crime Survey, which in Q3 2010/11 returned results of 79% for overall victim satisfaction and 68% for follow-up activity. This remains a concern, and more work may therefore be required to improve the quality of police interaction with crime victims.

The MPS has improved the quality of its decisions when re-classifying certain crimes and when making the decision to no-crime. There is still more to be done, although the impending centralisation of these decisions through a new Crime Recording and Investigation Bureau (CRIB) should help.

## **How does the force ensure that standards are met?**

The MPS has a regime of audits for incidents and crimes that focuses on areas that pose the greatest data quality risks, with effective follow-up activity to address any issues. This includes the CCC using a multi-layered approach to address incident data quality, with structured audits, randomised sampling and strong oversight.

The force also uses an array of specialised data to help scrutinise and compare crime management data for boroughs, and so to identify any anomalies. New system software has successfully reduced crime data error rates from 10% four years ago to their current level of 0.3% today.

## **Conclusions**

HMIC found strong arrangements at a senior level dedicated to securing the quality of incident and crime data recording, with adequate plans, policies and strategies in place to support them. However, force standards around recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so that they correctly reflect the sequence of events described by victims) varied.

Staff were well aware of their responsibilities around securing good quality data, and had the skills they needed to fulfil these. The MPS used robust audit and quality assurance processes to identify any issues and take action to address them.

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