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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**North Wales 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 North Wales Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by North Wales Police. Seven had been wrongly closed without a crime being recorded, which indicates that crimes in North Wales are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

Most types of crime-related incidents are automatically transferred from the command and control system to the crimes system, which improves the accuracy of data, although at present this does not include ASB.

HMIC highlighted the identification and initial management of ASB as a significant risk area for the force, particularly in relation to repeat and vulnerable victims, and plans are in place to address the issues raised.

The recently introduced procedure for classification of 'no crime' is strong and ethical, and has generated noticeable improvement in this area.

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

Despite the issues with ASB, there is evidence of a strong victim focus in North Wales Police, and a process that sets out how (and how often) the force makes contact with victims features as part of the initial investigation. Chief officers encourage the use of restorative justice, with a clear emphasis on victim satisfaction.

We found evidence that investigation and supervision in serious crime cases was strong, but this was less apparent for high-volume crimes (such as vehicle crime) and ASB. A recently introduced Investigation Support Team provides a platform to improve consistency and quality around incident and crime recording, and investigation.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

There is strong and purposeful leadership of crime and incident data quality in North Wales Police. The Deputy Chief Constable is the identified lead and has a widely-recognised stance on the importance of ethical crime recording. However, more work is required to disseminate this commitment to the front line, where knowledge of crime and incident standards and management of risk and vulnerability is low and would benefit from investment.

The Force Crime and Incident Registrar (FCIR) has the full support of chief officers. The role is well positioned and independent of performance management structures.

North Wales Police has a strong, yet proportionate, approach to auditing that is aligned to risk and has contributed to organisational improvement.

Conclusions

There are good arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data, supported by helpful plans, policies and strategies. However, HMIC highlighted the identification and initial management of ASB as a significant risk area for the force, particularly in relation to repeat and vulnerable victims.

There are opportunities to improve staff knowledge and understanding of crime and incident standards, and around management of risk and vulnerability. The force's strong crime and incident audit regime is aligned to risk and has contributed to organisational improvement.

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