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in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Northamptonshire 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 Northamptonshire Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Northamptonshire Police as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 1,545 calls that the force typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator of how accurately crime is being recorded. Ten records had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that Northamptonshire Police largely records crimes accurately as required by the NCRS.

The crime and incident recording training provided to staff in the force communications centre could be improved, as this is where the majority of initial calls for police assistance are received. This issue had been recognised by the force and steps are being taken to address it.

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

Victims are kept regularly updated on the progress of their cases and this is well documented within crime records. However, the force needs to develop processes that will help it identify repeat and vulnerable callers (such as those who are disabled or elderly) on every occasion, so they can get extra support if needed. Supervision of investigations was not always good, both in quality and in terms of how proactive it was. Plans for the investigation of crime should be used more consistently.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Northamptonshire Police from the top team and across the whole organisation are clearly committed to ensuring that crime recording is accurate and of the highest quality. The force carries out audits on whether crimes are being recorded in line with national guidance; findings from these checks are then brought to the attention of local and senior managers. Improvements could be made in the way the force manages the findings from these audits so that any issues can be rectified.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that Northamptonshire Police almost always records crimes accurately as required by the NCRS. Chief officers demonstrate strong leadership and reinforce the importance of accurate crime and incident recording throughout the organisation. Staff understand their responsibilities to ensure that crimes and incidents are recorded accurately. There are also sound quality assurance arrangements in place which means that if any issues do arise they are identified. However, the management of the findings from these procedures could be improved.

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