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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**South Yorkshire 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 South Yorkshire Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by South Yorkshire Police. Sixteen had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which gives some cause for concern – particularly in relation to the conversion of incidents to crimes in the violence and “other” categories. HMIC is confident that, in the face of considerable organisational change, the force has the necessary leadership, innovation and commitment to build upon its current achievements for crime and incident data quality; and we are satisfied the force is alive to the issues and will take the necessary action.

South Yorkshire Police uses a single centre for all its call handling, despatch and crime recording. This arrangement offers resilience, as staff are trained to fulfil a number of roles, and therefore can meet periods of high demand so that calls are not ‘lost’ and there is no delay in reporting them.

The data collected as part of this review showed that, when converting incidents to crimes, the information was transferred accurately from the incident system to the crime recording system. In the vast majority of cases, sufficient detail had been recorded on the system to offer assurance that they had been correctly classified.

In most cases, once an incident has been converted to a crime, follow-up activity by officers is not recorded on the incident log. This makes auditing more difficult.

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

The data collected showed that the South Yorkshire Police's contact with victims (to update them on the progress of their cases) was very good, and compliance with the force investigative standards is strong.

The force's Crime Management Policy sets out clearly the obligations for all staff in relation to both incident and crime recording and the provision of good victim care, and also contains investigative standards for investigators and supervisors.

The Data Quality Policy – which was reviewed in March 2011 and is available to all staff on the force intranet – has a well thought-out strategy for delivering good incident and crime data.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

We found that the Deputy Chief Constable and the Assistant Chief Constable (Territorial) both provided visible leadership in ensuring that data quality was seen to be and remained a force priority. They included the subject in regular meetings and in force performance reviews.

Staff involved in call handling, despatch and crime recording were all clear about the importance of data quality and were regularly assessed on their compliance with force and national standards.

The Force Crime and Incident Registrar is managed by the Force Performance Manager. This provides good opportunities for findings from the audits that the force carries out to be shared with and acted upon by district commanders. Despite this close working relationship, there is a clear distinction maintained between compliance and performance management, which means there can be confidence in the force's statistics.

Conclusions

HMIC found strong arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data, supported by helpful plans, policies and strategies. However, there were inconsistencies in how well the force captured an accurate account of the sequence of events described by victims. Staff understood their responsibilities around maintaining data quality, and had the skills they need to secure it. There were sound audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify any issues and take action to address them.