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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Thames Valley 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 Thames Valley Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Thames Valley Police, as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 3,325 calls that the force typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator of how accurately crime is being recorded. Only one had been wrongly closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that crimes in Thames Valley are nearly always recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS.

We found that Thames Valley Police has very good incident and crime recording systems, supported by staff who have the right skills to do their job well. In every record we looked at, staff had obtained enough information from the victim to make the decision on whether or not a crime should be recorded at the time of the initial call, ie without having to go back for more details at a later date. Incident and crime records contained sufficient information to support their decisions on how calls should be classified and dealt with.

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

The force takes a clear victim-focused approach. Staff effectively responded to victims' needs at every stage of investigation, including referring them to Victim Support. HMIC found that Thames Valley Police are particularly good at keeping victims informed of the progress of their cases.

The quality of investigations is also good. The force has clear policies setting out minimum expectations which are acted on and reflected in the crime and incident records. Staff have a good understanding of restorative justice (these are community-based approaches to holding offenders to account), which are well-established ways of dealing with offenders in Thames Valley.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

There is strong chief officer leadership on the issue of crime recording in Thames Valley Police and the police authority. Both are committed to ensuring high standards of crime and incident recording. We also found good processes in place to ensure that officers and staff have the knowledge they need to be able to do their job well. There are sound procedures at force and local levels to check the quality of incident and crime data.

Conclusions

The sample of incidents reviewed by HMIC indicates that crimes in Thames Valley are nearly always recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS; this suggests that the force has one of the highest levels of accuracy in the country. There is strong commitment and leadership from the top team to ensure high quality crime and incident records. Staff had the right skills and understanding to ensure that information is recorded to a high standard and that it accurately reflects events as described by the victim. The overall approach to the individual needs of the victims and how investigations are completed is supported by strong systems, processes and quality assurance arrangements. When issues are identified action is taken to address them.

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