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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Warwickshire 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 Warwickshire Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Warwickshire Police. Eleven had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in Warwickshire Police are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with NCRS. Identification of ASB incidents as crimes was however inconsistent: six of the 11 incidents which were not correctly classified as crimes were for reports of ASB.

Crimes in Warwickshire Police are either reported by telephone – with victims speaking directly to the crime management unit – or are recorded on paper records by officers attending incidents. There needs to be stronger supervision to ensure that all officers' paper crime records are scanned and sent to the crime management unit before staff go off duty. Late submissions make it difficult for the force to record all crime in a timely manner, comply with the 72-hour deadline as required by the HOCR, and prompt an effective investigation.

The crime management unit ensures that crimes are correctly classified, and that further investigation (where appropriate) is carried out by the local investigation teams. HMIC found that crimes and incidents records generally contained a good level of information to assist in making the correct decisions on how to classify records.

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

We found that investigations by Warwickshire Police were generally carried out effectively. However, the supervision directing the investigations was not routinely recorded in a consistent manner in the crime reports we examined; this could be strengthened. The force used appropriate means of disposals of crime, including the use of restorative justice; however, there were a number of incorrect 'no crime' decisions in the reports we examined.

The force had clear and concise plans for incident and crime recording, and an effective Force Crime Registrar and Crime Management Team in place to enforce these policies. However, the crime recording policies specifically around making off without payments from petrol stations are not HOCR compliant and need to be reviewed by the force.

Surveys of how satisfied victims of crime were with the service they received from the force showed encouraging results, although information on how and when the victim is updated on the progress of his or her case was not routinely stored in the crime records.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Warwickshire Police has invested in an experienced Force Crime Registrar, who has the full support of the Chief Officer Team and the police authority. They have also created the post of a Quality Assurance Officer within the communications centre, which is a positive step in driving up standards at this initial point of contact. HMIC found that the quality of crime and incident data was improving, and the Deputy Chief Constable had produced a short video on the force's intranet site which emphasised the importance of data quality for all staff.

The force has a comprehensive audit schedule which covers most aspects of the National Standard of Incident Recording (NSIR) and HOCRs in the reporting of incidents and crime reporting. It would benefit from strengthening the auditing arrangements to include outstanding 'skeleton crime reports' (those where an incident record has been created on the force IT system, but officers have not submitted their paper reports); this would ensure that all crimes have been correctly identified.

Conclusions

HMIC found a strong commitment at a senior level to securing the quality of incident and crime data, and that the force has invested in experienced staff to build on this. The force has recently conducted a major restructuring programme to make the best use of its resources. Following the restructure and new roles for staff, further investment is needed in order to accurately identify and record crimes involving ASB and to ensure that all crime reports are submitted by frontline staff to the crime management unit in a timely way. Recorded supervision and victim updates within the crime records need to be stronger, although the force is managing crime recording effectively, despite the challenges of using both paper-based and electronic records.

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ISBN: 978-1-84987-675-9
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