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in the **public interest**

Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**West Midlands 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 West Midlands Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 240 incidents logged by West Midlands Police. Twenty-six had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that there is some cause for concern – although the force would only need to improve slightly to result in a more positive judgement.

The force had a strategy for capturing crime and incident data, and HMIC found that the basic information recorded on incidents and crimes complied to an excellent level with the NCRS. The quality of incident and crime records was high; samples indicated that incident records contained good quality data and that crime classifications were being recorded correctly. Incidents that were converted to crimes were all recorded within the 72-hour deadline stipulated in the HOCR; vehicle incidents were also well managed, with crimes raised well within the HOCR deadline. However, attempts to identify whether ASB incidents involved repeat or vulnerable victims (so they can receive extra support, if needed) were only made in just over a quarter of the cases we examined.

There was concern that some incidents that should have been converted into crimes were not, especially in cases of ASB, although HMIC considers that improvement is likely. The force's IT systems were outdated and had limited capabilities, which increases the risk of recording crimes and incidents incorrectly. At the time of inspection, the force was unable to accurately monitor non-emergency telephone calls from the public: these were not always recorded and there were no systems for supervisors to discreetly monitor these calls at the first point of contact.

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

The Deputy Chief Constable was leading a programme of change to improve incident management processes, and to take a 'back to basics' approach to crime management and investigation. HMIC found that the force's approach to crime investigations (as laid out in the relevant policy) was usually tailored to the offence, although there was some evidence that this was not always consistently applied in practice.

Data sampling indicated that updates to victims on the progress of their cases was not always recorded; at the time of inspection the IT systems did not have a separate field for logging this activity, although one has since been developed.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

HMIC found that the quality of crime and incident data was improving in the West Midlands. The force and police authority have profiled and understand their risks in this area; these are included on a risk map and addressed through an audit programme.

A comprehensive audit schedule covers most aspects of crime and incident recording. These audits were proportionate to risk, and were being used to improve service delivery; however, auditing crime systems was made complicated by the multiplicity of different IT systems, and by the need to use both paper-based and electronic records.

The Force Crime Registrar and his team demonstrated an excellent understanding of crime and incident data recording. This was not the case for all frontline staff, whose understanding was dependent on experience.

Conclusions

HMIC found that the quality of crime and incident data in West Midlands was improving, although there is still some way to go before standards reach a satisfactory level. There was clear and purposeful leadership on crime and incident data quality, with mechanisms of accountability within both the force and police authority. This was supported by a well-managed, proportionate, robust and effective audit regime. However, risks remain through the impact of legacy IT systems and the consequential inefficiencies and limited capability.

We found helpful plans, policies and strategies in place, which aimed to secure good quality data. The force also had high standards in recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate way, to correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims.