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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Wiltshire 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 Wiltshire Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Wiltshire Police. Six had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in Wiltshire are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with the NCRS. However, previous policy and practices led to some inconsistent recording and compliance with the NCRS.

We found that the force generally complied with the NCRS when incidents are recorded as crimes, and this was helped by good training and quality control by the Contact Management Team. Force IT systems were integrated and allowed staff to record details consistently in order to accurately reflect the local crime and ASB picture.

In January 2011, the force introduced a 'Proportionate Crime Recording Policy', which aimed to incorporate more professional judgement into crime recording. This policy was not compliant with the HOCR. It was rapidly reviewed and remedial short term and longer term action taken: but as a consequence, it is possible that community crime levels were not being accurately recorded, which reduced overall confidence in crime data.

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

HMIC found that initial investigations by contact management staff and police officers on the ground were consistently good. Subsequent investigations were also good overall, and supervision was proportionate to the offence and risk.

Staff ensure that contacting victims of crime with updates on the progression of their case is a priority – although this was not being measured effectively when we inspected. Early identification of repeat and vulnerable victims (so they can get extra support if needed) had improved a little since HMIC's 2010 ASB inspection, but was still not consistent, and there was no means of flagging up such victims automatically.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

There has been strong leadership to reduce data errors. However, issues and risks identified in audits need to be addressed more robustly, and be integrated with the current performance regime. With the exception of the Contact Management Team, we found that staff knowledge and understanding of the HOCR was inconsistent. The Force Crime Registrar also needs more Chief Officer Team support for his difficult role.

At the time of the inspection, the same chief officer was responsible both for improving Wiltshire's crime statistics and for the force's compliance with the HOCR. In order to reassure the public that crime statistics can be trusted, these responsibilities need to be separated out.

Conclusions

HMIC found limited but improving arrangements at senior levels to ensure accurate crime records were maintained. The exception to this was the drive to reduce factual data errors, where senior leadership was in place. Some uncertain plans, policies and strategies made good quality data more difficult to secure, but urgent action had been taken to improve compliance. Previous practices restricted the force's ability to capture an accurate account of the sequence of events described by victims. Clearer staff responsibilities and improved skills would generate better quality records on incidents and crime. There were basic audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify issues and take action to address them.

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