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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**South Wales 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 Wales Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by South Wales Police. Fourteen had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crime recording in South Wales gives some cause for concern. HMIC is however confident that South Wales Police will improve in this regard.

There were good examples of accurate crime and incidents recording, but this was not consistent across the force. There was also no crime-related incident category available (as there is in other forces' recording systems). This meant that South Wales Police had to find a different classification for incidents that would have gone into this category: and in the data sample we took, they had sometimes made the wrong decision, and so recorded incidents incorrectly.

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

There was evidence of good force-level investigative policies attached to the force's incident recording system, which includes comprehensive check lists to aid primary investigations by staff in the contact management centre. However, variations in local policies had led to a lack of consistency across the force.

Whilst the Force Crime Registrar intervened strongly to ensure correct investigation and classification of incidents, there was evidence of inconsistent supervision of the incident recording and decision-making processes.

The standard of care to victims was of a good quality overall.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The police authority ensures that chief officers and basic command unit (BCU, a local policing area) commanders are accountable, but there needs to be a greater focus specifically in relation to crime and incident data quality and awareness of the HOQRs by frontline staff. There was evidence that some staff are skilled and dedicated, and some examples of good supervision; however, this was inconsistent. A recent restructuring from six to four BCUs and aligned contact management centres has had a positive effect. Future changes to create one Public Service Centre with four local investigative hubs will further strengthen this.

Senior managers should make the strategic direction for crime and incident data quality more clear, to ensure a consistent focus on this as an issue. This will, in turn, ensure victim care is prioritised, so reducing risk.

Conclusions

Greater clarity and focus from chief officers and the police authority on the need to secure good quality crime and incident data would deliver significant improvements in South Wales. However, due to the large-scale force restructuring changes planned for 2011/12, there were no plans, policies and strategies in place to manage this in the immediate future. Whilst there was evidence of good crime and incident recording that correctly reflected the experience of the victim, this was not consistently the case. There is an opportunity to improve performance in this area by investing in more direct supervision, and increasing staff knowledge of crimes and legislation; the planned implementation of the new Public Service Centre will help with this.

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