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## **Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports**

**West Mercia Police  
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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](http://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 Mercia Police**

### **Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?**

HMIC looked at 121 incidents logged by West Mercia Police. Ten had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in West Mercia are generally recorded accurately and in accordance with NCRS.

We found that the Chief Officer was committed to improving performance and standards around crime and incident recording and data quality. Investment in the level of training in these areas given to control room and frontline staff would further support this.

HMIC identified concerns in relation to 'no-crime' authorisations where forces change the status of reported crimes on their systems. The force should review the decision-making function and associated processes, promoting tighter and more effective decision-making in relation to these 'no crimes'.

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

HMIC found that there was a positive culture in West Mercia around focusing on the needs of the victim, and that the force was good at recording how and when victims are updated on the progress of their cases.

There was an effective risk assessment process to ensure an appropriate and victim-centred response to repeat and vulnerable callers. However, referral to the Victim Support Scheme was inconsistent: the process for doing this was being reviewed.

HMIC found that investigations reviewed during the process were often subject to minimal levels of recorded supervision and there was inconsistency across the force in the use of crime investigation plans.

### **How does the force ensure that standards are met?**

While HMIC found that chief officer and police authority commitment to improve overall performance in West Mercia was strong, the force acknowledged that this needs to be more explicit in relation to the quality of crime and incident data. The status of the Force Crime Registrar could be enhanced through stronger and more direct line management from a member of the Chief Officer Team.

The force's Audit and Inspection Team provides an effective, risk-based, and proportionate audit system at a strategic level, with a clear link to the force risk register. There was, however, no corporate processes in place to ensure audit findings were actioned or reviewed. The way audits are conducted and managed therefore needs to be strengthened (in line with a clear force strategy) to generate continuous improvement.

## **Conclusions**

HMIC found strong commitment at a senior level to securing the quality of incident and crime data. There was, however, no overarching strategy or associated action plan currently in place to support this commitment. More investment needs to be put into ensuring staff are fully aware of their responsibilities around data quality, and that they have the skills to fulfil them.

The force's audit system operates well at a strategic level to identify risk. However, a clearer process needs to be adopted to ensure audit actions are followed through and monitored to generate force improvement.