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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Avon and Somerset Constabulary
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 Avon and Somerset Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incidents logged by Avon and Somerset Constabulary. Seventeen had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crime recording standards in Avon and Somerset give some cause for concern. Nine of the 17 incidents which were incorrectly classified related to reports of ASB.

The Constabulary records the majority of crimes at the initial point of contact in their Force Service Centre. All crimes which are reported by phone are then classified by the centralised Crime Screening Unit. Those reported in other ways are passed to the Service Centre, which generates a crime report.

We found that crime and incident records generally included a good amount of information, which helped staff make the right decisions about how to classify them. However, some crime recording policies did not fully comply with the NCRS; the Constabulary should revisit these, and other local policies. In addition, the Constabulary did not identify ASB incidents as crimes in a consistent way.

The way local districts manage reports of crimes and incidents that are passed to them requires strengthening, and this is currently being reviewed as part of the Constabulary's change programme.

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

HMIC found that investigations by Avon and Somerset Constabulary were generally carried out effectively. However, in the crime reports we examined, recorded supervision directing the investigations could be strengthened. The Constabulary has launched a service on its website ('Track my crime') which allows victims to track the progress of their investigation, and HMIC found evidence that it generally approaches investigations with a focus on the needs of the victim. Further work, however, is needed to record within the crime reports when victims are updated on the progress of their case.

The Constabulary uses appropriate means of disposals of crime, including the use of restorative justice – although there were a number of incorrect no-crime decisions of the reports we examined.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Senior teams in Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Police Authority had put a clear emphasis on improving the quality of crime and incident data, and the Constabulary's 'Quality Counts' values were widely recognised and understood by staff. At the time of inspection, the Constabulary was implementing a new Contact Management Strategy, which will strengthen and improve the way it manages reported crime and incidents. The Constabulary should, however, change the roles of staff making no-crime decisions, and continue reviewing local policies to ensure they comply fully with the NCRS.

We found that the Constabulary regularly audited the recording of crimes and the findings were discussed and acted upon at performance meetings. However, audits for the recording of incidents, especially those that are managed by local areas, could be carried out more thoroughly. The Constabulary was considering how it could improve in this area as part of its change programme.

Conclusions

Senior staff were strongly committed to improving the quality of crime and incident recording, and the Constabulary was reviewing its policies to do this. Experienced staff in the centralised Crime Screening Unit and the Force Service Centre showed good understanding of their responsibilities around recording crime data, but the Constabulary needs to work to improve the consistency with which it records ASB incidents as crimes.

Structured audits of recorded crimes helped identify areas where the Constabulary can improve, but these would be of greater use if recorded incidents – especially those that are managed by the local areas – were audited in a similar way.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary will be addressing many of these issues once they have put in place their Contact Management Strategy, as part of their ongoing change programme.