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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Leicestershire 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 Leicestershire Constabulary

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 120 incident records created by Leicestershire Constabulary as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 1,946 calls that the Constabulary typically receives each day, but provides an indicator of how accurately crime is being recorded. Six of these calls for assistance had been closed without a crime being properly recorded; this sampling provides an initial indication that Leicestershire Constabulary almost always records crimes accurately as required by the crime recording standards.

Leicestershire Constabulary has effective systems and processes in place to capture crime and ASB reports. However, staff who make the decision to de-classify a record that was initially recorded as a crime (ie to 'no crime') do not fully comply with the national guidance. A number of 'no crimes' that were examined did not contain sufficient detail to justify the decision.

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

The Constabulary had a good approach to maintaining high data quality. Frontline staff (eg neighbourhood police officers, and those who respond to 999 calls) are given clear guidance on their investigations. Dedicated staff review the records of all calls for assistance to ensure they had been dealt with properly.

Staff show a strong commitment to updating victims on the progress of the investigation relating to their crime. Leicestershire Constabulary has a victim-focused approach to crime recording. It is good at quickly identifying repeat and vulnerable victims, such as those who are disabled or elderly, so they can be given extra support if needed.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

The Constabulary has recently undertaken a review of its approach to recording and managing crime and incident data to ensure it is effective and efficient. The police authority has appointed a lead member for data quality; this should improve the authority's oversight of this important area of business. Regular audits for compliance with national guidelines take place; however, arrangements for acting on recommendations are not always as effective as they could be.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that crimes in Leicestershire Constabulary are generally recorded accurately as required by the crime recording standards. There is strong chief officer leadership in this area. Clear guidance for staff and rigorous quality checks, coupled with sound audit arrangements, help to ensure good quality incident and crime data in Leicestershire. The Constabulary now has good processes in place to enable it to identify repeat and vulnerable victims of ASB. The recent review provides an ideal opportunity to resolve some of the issues HMIC identified: for example, a lack of clarity around when to record a 'no crime'.

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