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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Sussex 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 Sussex Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 121 incident records created by Sussex Police as a result of calls for assistance from the public. This is a small sample compared to the 2,122 calls that the force typically receives each day, but it provides an indicator of how accurately crime is being recorded. Fourteen had been closed without a crime being properly recorded. This sampling provides an initial indication that Sussex Police does not always record crime as accurately as the national guidelines require. However, the review took place before the force moved to a central crime recording structure. The force has a strong commitment to recording crime accurately, and the changes that were introduced have standardised and improved processes across Sussex.

Although Sussex Police has put in place good incident and crime recording processes, its IT systems are not fully linked. As a result information is not automatically shared. This means that staff in the Police Contact Centre (where initial calls for assistance are taken) have to initiate manual searches in order to accurately identify victims of repeat crime or ASB, and also victims whose circumstances mean they are especially vulnerable, such as those who are disabled or elderly. There are risks that some repeat or vulnerable victims will not be identified at the earliest stage of their call for assistance, meaning that they might not get extra support if needed.

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

The force had issued good guidance to staff on how to deal with recorded crimes and incidents. Staff have a strong commitment to focusing on the needs of victims and making sure that they are kept updated on the progress of their cases. A dedicated team reviews initial incident and crime records to ensure that they have been dealt with properly in terms of the response and service to the public.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

Sussex Police from the top team and across the whole organisation are clearly committed to ensuring that crime recording is accurate. The force has put in place crime recording procedures supported by training to ensure that staff involved in crime recording have the right skills to do their job well. However, improvements could be made in the way the force and the police authority monitor data quality to ensure that

they have a better understanding of where improvements could be made.

Conclusions

HMIC sampling indicates that Sussex Police could do more to improve the quality of crime and incident recording, although it is clear that there is strong chief officer leadership in this area and the force is committed to ensuring high standards. The force takes a victim-focused approach to investigation with the overall approach supported by improved systems, processes and quality assurance arrangements.

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