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

**Durham 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](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 Durham Constabulary**

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

HMIC looked at 118 incidents logged by Durham Constabulary. Thirteen had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which gives some cause for concern – particularly in relation to the conversion of incidents to crimes for ASB. HMIC is confident that, in the face of considerable organisational change, the Constabulary has the necessary leadership, innovation and commitment to build upon its current achievements for crime and incident data quality; we are also satisfied that the Constabulary is alive to the issues and will take the necessary action.

Durham Constabulary's compliance with the NCRS is mainly due to a rigorous quality assurance regime within the Communications Department, supported by the Crime Management Unit. The Deputy Chief Constable, supported by the Force Crime Registrar, champions crime and incident data, which ensures that data quality issues are resolved quickly. However, the force needs to be more consistent in the details it records on crimes and incidents, to make sure they are correctly classified and given the most appropriate response.

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

HMIC found that investigations in Durham were carried out efficiently, effectively and in proportion to the severity of the crime. Investigators were guided by a set of minimum standards and supported by specialist staff who oversaw how crime investigations were managed and closed. The contact Durham Constabulary had with victims was very good, supported by helpful computer systems which reminded staff when updates to victims were due. However, the Constabulary needs to ensure a consistent approach is adopted by all supervisors when checking the quality of investigations.

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

Durham Constabulary had a well-established incident and crime data quality auditing programme, which focused particularly on areas that posed the greatest risks. Findings from these audits were reviewed as part of the Constabulary's performance management regime, with actions to address short-comings recorded and monitored.

The Force Crime and Incident Registrar is the final arbiter for disputes concerning how the HOCRs should be applied. However, the Constabulary needs to ensure recent changes to staff roles and responsibilities do not have a detrimental impact on the quality of crime and incident data.

## **Conclusions**

There were strong arrangements at a senior level around securing good quality incident and crime data, supported by helpful plans, policies and strategies. The Constabulary had high standards when recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims). Staff's skills and awareness of their responsibilities in this area were well established, and audit and quality assurance processes were in place to identify any issues and take action to address them.

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