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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**Merseyside 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 Merseyside Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 238 incidents logged by Merseyside Police. Twenty-nine had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crime recording in Merseyside gives some cause for concern.

The Deputy Chief Constable championed the issue of crime and incident data and was supported by the Force Crime and Incident Registrar and police authority. However, HMIC found that some force arrangements meant there was the potential for each local area to offer a different level of service to members of the public: the absence of a corporate crime allocation policy has been acknowledged and is to be addressed. The force needs to improve quality assurance processes to ensure consistent standards are being achieved.

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

The force has put minimum standards in place to ensure crime investigations were carried out proportionately, efficiently and effectively. There were examples of good use of restorative justice and community resolution: however, this needs to be more widely adopted across the force. A consistent approach to the management of investigation plans by all supervisors is also required.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

HMIC found that Merseyside Police and Police Authority had appropriate structures in place to ensure basic audits of incident and crime data can take place. The force was however reviewing its audit functions, having identified the need to make these processes more efficient.

The Force Crime and Incident Registrar is the final arbiter for disputes concerning how the HOCA should be applied. However, staff responsibilities and skills to help secure good quality crime and incident data were insufficiently established.

Conclusions

Arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data were limited, and the force's standards in recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims) varied. Staff's skills and awareness of their responsibilities in this area were insufficiently established; there were however basic audit and quality assurance processes in place.

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