

RESPONSE DATED 10TH SEPTEMBER TO 'AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY CRIME DATA INTEGRITY INSPECTION, REVISIT' PUBLISHED BY HMICFRS ON 24TH JULY 2020

I recognise the importance of Crime Data Integrity (CDI) and have incorporated this into my Police and Crime Plan through objective 3.4 “the Constabulary will consistently and accurately record crime, taking people seriously and offering an empathetic response when they report crimes”. CDI is fundamentally about ensuring victims and the public receive the best possible service. It also helps ensure good quality data on which policy and resource decisions can be made both locally and nationally.

Following the CDI inspection revisit in January 2020 Wendy Williams, Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary, wrote to the Chief Constable on 4th March 2020; the Chief Constable responded on 16th March 2020. I have seen this letter and my office was represented at the debrief immediately after the inspection and the findings were discussed at a Police and Crime Board. I have regular briefings from the Force and Crime Incident Registrar (FCIR) and my office is represented on the Constabulary’s governance group which oversees CDI.

As noted in the letter, prior to the inspection, the Constabulary had undertaken a thorough review of its own crime recording processes with a number of recommendations for improvement. These recommendations were implemented from November 2019 which was after the time period for the data used in the inspection which was July to September 2019.

I was pleased that the letter recognised that the implementation of recommendations from the inspection four years ago had led to improvements in recording of rape and modern slavery.

It is disappointing that, although not statistically significant, the overall recording compliance had decreased from the previous inspection. The principal areas for improvement were highlighted as “*failures by officers and staff to identify and record domestic abuse related violent crimes and all crimes reported in incidents involving more than one crime.*”

In response to this year’s inspection, the Constabulary wrote a report with over 50 recommendations. This report included the findings of a Detective Inspector who reviewed all records where a missed crime was identified in the inspection. This review considered the implications on the victim; any missed investigative opportunities; and to ensure that victims were appropriately safeguarded. Areas of learning have been actioned and there has been relevant service recovery for victims.

It is also important to understand the context of why domestic abuse crimes particularly were highlighted by HMICFRS as showing poor compliance. That is to say, domestic abuse is a priority for me and the Constabulary due to the very harmful nature of the crime and the vulnerability of those involved. Additionally there are a couple of elements, in relation to crime recording practices particularly, which present a greater risk of failure with this crime type.

Firstly it is standard procedure for officers dealing with domestic abuse to complete a DASH risk assessment with the victim. This assessment asks the victim if they have been abused on previous occasions or been the victim of other crimes other than that which the officers are there to deal with. Victims can sometimes disclose additional offences that were not previously known to police and where they do these extra offences should be recorded but are on some occasions missed. Domestic abuse by its nature means there is a greater likelihood of these previously undisclosed offences having occurred.

The second element relates to the principal crime rule: this rule states that where offences occur together as part of one event and are the same victim and offender only the most serious crime is recorded. Exceptions to this rule, where an additional crime must be recorded, include stalking, harassment and controlling and coercive behaviour. These exceptions tend to see lower compliance with the counting rules and the offences subject to these exceptions are all predominantly seen in domestic abuse situations.

The recommendations from this internal report included a number with a specific focus on communications and training which will see a new e-learning package; a number of supportive briefing videos; and the use of face-to-face training commencing in the autumn of 2020. Alongside this there will be a number of proposals to consider the process for filing crimes to ensure that there is adequate supervision in place for crime recording decisions.

In order to check and test the implementation of all the recommendations, from both internal reports, and the effect they have had on CDI the Constabulary will be undertaking an internal audit using HMICFRS methodology. The audit will be conducted by the FCIR and her team and will report back before the end of the year. The Constabulary is also considering how it can move to conducting more regular CDI audits as well.

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