04 August 2010

Police National Computer Inspections

Scotland's police forces must do more to improve both the accuracy and efficiency of data input to the Police National Computer (PNC) according to a report issued today.

The report from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland found that progress to address previously highlighted issues is too slow and that a continued lack of senior level direction is resulting in the inefficient use of personnel time and excessive instances of incomplete recording.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland, Bill Skelly said:

"Maintaining accurate criminal records is critical not only to the criminal justice organisations that use this information but for reasons of public safety".

"Our report shows that since our original inspection in 2005, progress to implement the recommendations remains slow, with the majority of forces still lacking a clear strategic direction on PNC".

"It is also important to recognise that the integrity of data relies on input from the three main criminal justice agencies. I appreciate the significant progress already made by Scotland's criminal justice partners to integrate their systems but we found that in practice the flow of information between the three needs to be more robust if we are to prevent omissions and failures arising between the Scottish systems and the PNC".

"Moreover, as all computer record errors currently default to the police, every force in Scotland is responsible for correcting not only its own errors but those of all criminal justice partners. The result is in an inefficient use of police time and resource simply to support the system itself"

"I have highlighted particular concerns regarding the number of Impending Prosecutions currently sitting on the system and a national weeding policy designed to help manage this. We had already drawn this matter to the attention of ACPOS and the SPSA and I am pleased they have now taken action to identify the main reasons behind cases not being updated and are working with criminal justice partners to rectify the situation".

"We would urge forces and the SPSA to work together with criminal justice partners to address all issues raised and drive greater efficiencies in public services"

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Notes to Editors:

In 2005, at the request of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, PNC Inspectors from HMIC England and Wales conducted an inspection of all Scottish forces to review their compliance with the PNC Code of Practice. A total of 97 recommendations were made.

HMIC revisited all Scottish forces in 2009 to review progress. The Scotland-wide themes can be found in the attached report.

The Police National Computer (PNC) is the primary police computer system in the UK. It holds details of people, vehicles, crimes and property that can be electronically accessed 24 hours a day by the police and other criminal justice agencies. It allows information to be shared through a secure network and is also electronically linked to a number of other databases used in public protection and law enforcement.

While all police forces in Scotland can and do have direct access to PNC, the vast majority of transactions concerning the start and end results of criminal proceedings are processed through Scotland's own computerised Criminal History System (CHS). The CHS has a wide range of functions, allowing procurators fiscal to update impending cases and courts to enter case results, all of which are subsequently transferred to PNC.

There is a Scottish weeding policy for unresulted cases on CHS. It is used by police forces to review and remove unresulted cases from their records. If a case is weeded from CHS after three years the PNC is updated accordingly.

The Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) is responsible for overseeing and managing the CHS, as well as ensuring the police service's compliance with the accompanying Code of Practice.

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) is responsible for inspecting the eight Scottish police forces and the constituent services provided by SPSA. HMICS operates independently of the police forces, police authorities and the Scottish Government and exists to monitor and improve the police services in Scotland.

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