

REDUCING THE DATA BURDEN ON POLICE FORCES IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Home Office

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Introduction by Sir David Normington, Permanent Secretary, Home Office

1. The Policing Green Paper announced that I would lead a review of the data collection burden placed on police forces in England and Wales by the Home Office with the aim of reducing the burden by up to 50 per cent. This is the report of my review. It contains proposals, most of which can be implemented immediately, for:
 - cutting out altogether or significantly reducing 36 data streams;
 - an end to Activity-Based Costing;
 - a reduction in ad hoc data requests;
 - a two-year moratorium on requests for new data collection; and
 - a new 'Gateway' process to limit requests for data which fall outside the statutory Annual Data Requirement.
2. I also strongly endorse the existing Home Office plan for a new Data Hub in 2009/10, which will greatly reduce the burden on police forces, dispensing with a further 40 per cent of Annual Data Requirements.
3. Taken together these measures will, I believe, very significantly reduce the central data burden imposed by the Home Office and its agencies and put in place arrangements to continue to bear down on data burdens in the future. Because of the varying data

collection practices across forces, it is not possible to estimate precisely the extent of the reduction proposed in this report. But I am confident that the combination of removing or reducing 36 data streams, an end to Activity-Based Costing and a bearing down on ad hoc requests should reduce the burden imposed by the Home Office and its agencies by about one-third. When the Data Hub is in place, it should be close to 50 per cent or even more.

4. Finally, this needs to be the start, not the end, of a process. Data burdens are not just created by the Home Office or its agencies. They come, often unthinkingly, from people and agencies in all parts of the system, including from within the Police Service itself. A change in culture and practice is required at every level, so that the cost of collecting information becomes a first, not a last, consideration. When data is collected, it should be at minimum cost, collected once and used many times. I hope this report is a contribution to making this change.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Normington".

David Normington
February 2009

Reducing the burden of data collection on police forces

1. This brief report is in four parts:
 - an explanation of how the review was conducted;
 - some context on reduction in bureaucracy;
 - a discussion of how and why data is collected by the Home Office, with some proposals for changing the processes; and
 - proposals for reducing the data burden.

HOW THE REVIEW WAS CONDUCTED

2. I was assisted in this review by a small team within the Home Office led by Deputy Chief Constable Stephen Cahill and supported by Samantha Leahy-Harland and Chief Superintendents Michelle Dunn and Paul Dowell. This team did most of the detailed work and I am very grateful to them for their persistence and determination.
3. The Home Office relies on a range of police data to fulfil our key responsibilities:
 - to develop, implement and evaluate policy;
 - to support performance management;
 - to demonstrate accountability; and
 - to provide public information and national statistics.
4. The team first mapped the range of data required from the police by the Home Office. We then conducted a challenge exercise where we assessed the necessity of each requirement, the extent of the 'burden' and how it could be reduced. We were helped in this work by experts in data collection from five forces (Metropolitan Police Service, Thames Valley, West Midlands, Essex and Warwickshire). At each significant phase they helped

us test our proposals and understand better the extent of the demand which a data stream imposed.

5. The scoping work undertaken by the team identified an extensive range of data requirements from all areas of Home Office business. Additionally, we worked closely with the Office for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR), which is now part of the Ministry of Justice, and with the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). Both conducted parallel reviews and willingly subjected themselves to the same process of challenge and review. The outcome of that work is contained in this report. We are clear that demands are placed on the police by data requests from other agencies at a national and local level. While these were outside the scope of this review, we hope that the 'Gateway' process recommended later in this review will provide a place where demands for data from others might be examined and challenged. We did not include Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), but we comment further on their work at the end of this report.
6. Finally, we cast the net wide, looking as far as possible at communications with forces which request the gathering of information in any medium. This took us wider than pure 'data' collection, but gave us confidence that we were covering the main landscape of data burdens.

THE CONTEXT OF REDUCING BUREAUCRACY

7. The context of the review, as set out in the July 2008 Policing Green Paper, is a major drive to reduce the perception, and sometimes the reality, of central direction of the police by the Home Office, coupled with a determined effort to reduce bureaucracy in front-line policing.
8. Since the Green Paper was published, a number of major developments have occurred in parallel with this review:
 - The Home Office has removed all top-down numerical targets for police forces. These will be replaced by one centrally set target that measures public confidence in the police.

- The Home Office's Police and Crime Standards Directorate, which enforced the previous national performance system for policing, has been wound up. This is being replaced by a stronger role for HMIC and a greater emphasis on local accountability.
 - Jan Berry, the former Chairman of the Police Federation, has been appointed by the Home Secretary as the Reducing Bureaucracy Advocate. Her immediate focus is on ten key processes affecting policing with a view to streamlining them and, where appropriate, designing standard forms. She is assessing the progress made in the reducing bureaucracy initiatives proposed in Sir Ronnie Flanagan's independent review of policing published in February 2008.
 - The NPIA has been introducing hand-held devices which enable officers to enter details directly on to mobile information systems, thereby ensuring better-quality data is recorded and, importantly, allowing more time to be spent on front-line policing. By December 2008, nearly 23,000 devices had been issued to front-line police officers. Part of Jan Berry's work will be to look at how further use of technology can free up more front-line policing time.
 - The Home Secretary announced on 18 September 2008 her decision to fast-track measures to cut form filling in nine of the areas of the Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP). An additional three police force areas were involved in the initial pilot scheme which aimed to abolish the lengthy stop and account form and instead require the police to record only the ethnicity of the person stopped and to provide them with a pre-printed receipt. From 1 January 2009 this now applies to all forces, and they are being strongly encouraged to make best use of technology such as Airwave to record ethnicity. This should lead to savings in officer time of around 690,000 hours a year.
9. This review of data contributes to the wider drive both to reduce central direction and to remove bureaucracy. Its main contribution should be to reduce the number and frequency of regular data returns from police forces to the Home Office and to simplify the process of collection and transmission. Its direct impact – except in the proposals relating to Activity-Based Costing – will be on those in forces charged with data collection and collation, rather than directly on front-line officers. But we hope that there will be a knock-on effect to those at the front line who have to make reports or collect specific information.

THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION BY THE HOME OFFICE

WHY DOES THE HOME OFFICE NEED DATA?

10. The Policing Green Paper signals a new strategic role for the Home Office. On the one hand, it will retain an important leadership role – setting the policy and legislative framework for policing and crime, championing the public interest, developing high-quality leadership at all levels and designing and developing effective systems for ensuring police accountability to the public. On the other hand, it is committed to withdrawal from a lot of the previous top-down target setting and performance management, focusing national level performance management on public confidence and intervening in the system only in cases of serious failure.
11. This implies a need for national-level data about policing and crime for four main purposes:
- i) **Public information and national statistics:** A democratic system requires a level of national information and statistics for the public and Parliament on policing activity, allowing judgements to be made on policing performance, efficiency, fairness and outcomes.
 - ii) **Accountability:** It will continue to be necessary both for the national system as a whole and for individual forces to be able to demonstrate to Parliament that resources are being well spent and achieving the desired results.

- iii) **Policy making:** Information and data are needed to ensure both that resources and national policies are focused on the right priorities and that policies are workable and deliverable.
 - iv) **Performance management and support:** There will now be a single top-down target for individual forces; but there will be a continuing need to measure national progress against the Public Service Agreements and Home Office strategic objectives and to demonstrate how the Police Service and others are performing on key issues.
12. The Home Office also has a responsibility – with its national agencies – to ensure that there is good local information about policing and crime, so that police authorities can hold their forces to account for their performance and so that the public themselves can assess police performance. This requires a certain standardisation of the collection and presentation of data, so that forces and police authorities can compare their performance in key areas of policy, operations and performance.

HOW IS DATA COLLECTED?

13. The Home Office collects data from the police in four main ways:
- i) **The Annual Data Requirement (ADR):** This is the statutory requirement (under the Police Act 1996) which sets down what the police must collect, at what frequency and in what form. It is the main way in which data is collected to the required standard and on a comparative basis. There is a well-established process for consulting the police about changes, which starts 15 months before the start of a financial year with requests for new data requirements and deletions. There has been an 8 per cent reduction in the ADR in the last two years, reflecting the existing challenge in the system to new requirements.
 - ii) **National statistics:** These are a subset of the data requested under the ADR and consist of key statistical information, such as police recorded crime. These inform policy and play a

key role in informing Parliament and members of the public about the state of policing, and enable the impact of government policies and actions to be assessed.

- iii) **Bespoke research programmes:** There are numerous requests for data resulting from various nationally led research programmes. These usually involve samples of forces doing special data collection exercises, although these are normally voluntary.
- iv) **Ad hoc requests:** We also identified a large number of ad hoc requests of other kinds. These can be part of, for example, national programmes, like the Tackling Knives Action Programme, where there is a premium on collecting more detailed data quickly. They often result also from Parliamentary Questions or public enquiries, where the data requested does not exist at a national level and has to be collected specially from a police force or forces to fulfil the request.

PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO PROCESSES

14. In examining these processes we have adopted the following principles:
- As far as possible, all national data requests should be part of the ADR and subject to its rigorous approval processes.
 - Ad hoc requests outside the normal processes should be kept to a minimum.
 - Where data collection is essential, it should only be collected once and then used to meet as many data needs as possible.
15. With these principles in mind, we propose three changes to **the process for overseeing data collection**. First, the Home Office should establish a ‘Gateway Group’ to vet all requests for ad hoc collections of data from within the Home Office and its agencies outside the normal ADR process. This should initially be chaired by the Permanent Secretary. The aim will be to ensure that new data requests are kept to a minimum and that the

reductions proposed later in this report actually happen. It will also work to ensure that the new requirements related to the single national target on police confidence are not over complicated or over engineered. It will be open to any police forces to draw to the attention of the Gateway Group a data request which seems to have 'slipped through the net' and to ask for its justification to be explained. We propose that Jan Berry, in her role as Reducing Bureaucracy Advocate, should be a member of the group to provide a link between this work and her wider work on reducing bureaucracy. This should also enable the group to identify data burdens that come from other parts of government and its agencies and to question their justification.

16. Secondly, we propose a moratorium on additions to the ADR until 2011. Where there is an urgent new requirement which cannot wait until then, it should be put to the new Gateway Group as a specific exception and, if approved there, signed off by a minister.

17. Thirdly, we would like to see whether the provisional data collections for national statistics could be more routinely used for policy development and other operational purposes. This needs to be done with care to avoid a situation in which data collected for national statistics purposes is published prematurely without the appropriate statistical standards being met. But equally we found the absurd situation arising where data was being collected twice, once for national statistics purposes, and once to measure progress and performance. We propose some urgent discussions with the Home Office's statisticians and the National Statistician to devise a protocol for the wider use of data collected for national statistics purposes.

18. We believe it essential that ad hoc requests should be kept to a minimum, because they can be time-consuming and expensive and, all too often, these become permanent data streams. For ad hoc requests linked to a new national programme or research programme we propose they should be subject to the Gateway process described in paragraph 15.

19. For Parliamentary Questions and MPs' and peers' letters there is clearly a balance to be struck between, on the one hand, the central importance of accountability to Parliament and the need to be helpful and open in dealing with MPs and peers and, on the other, the importance of not creating additional data collection burdens. If the data is collected by the Home Office, then there should be no problem in providing it. If it is not, then it should only be provided if it is easily available from police forces or the individual force concerned. In general, special data collection exercises should not be carried out for these purposes, unless specifically approved by the minister concerned. Where the collection of data would involve new burdens, it will be important to explain to the person requesting the information why it is not available.

20. Finally, we strongly support the action under way to implement the new Home Office Data Hub during 2009/10 and hope that there will be no slippage in the timetable. This new database will automate the supply of crime and detections data from existing force management systems. It will enable the Home Office and police forces to share data without the need for specific requests or transmissions. The estimate is that it will dispense with 40 per cent of the ADR currently supplied by forces. But there is one caveat. The freer availability to the Home Office of data held by forces does not remove the need for rigour in deciding what is to be collected on a mandatory basis. So the additional safeguards set out in the preceding paragraphs remain important.

PROPOSALS FOR REDUCING THE CURRENT DATA BURDEN

21. We now turn to the current data collection burden. We have, as described earlier, reviewed the need for, and frequency of, current data streams. When we began this exercise we examined 111 existing and proposed data streams and, against this baseline, we believe there is scope for substantial reductions, cutting out altogether, or reducing significantly, 36 of these data streams. A full list is in the annex to this report.

22. There are four particular proposals we would wish to highlight:

- i) First, we believe that, in addition to the 36 data streams, Activity-Based Costing should be abolished with immediate effect. As a result of Activity-Based Costing, many thousands of front-line officers are required to complete a form over two weeks which sets out exactly what they are doing every 15 minutes. This is a sample survey, not one applying every year to every police officer or every force. But it has become one of the visible emblems of a national burden, and, more important, there are few people in the system who think it measures front-line activity accurately. This is also the conclusion reached by Jan Berry in her work on reducing bureaucracy. We and she are at one in proposing its abolition. We welcome the current discussions between HMIC, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the NPIA and the Home Office, about the best ways to assess police productivity more accurately, including on a comparative basis. But we want to caution against the replacement of one burden with a new one and will want to examine carefully, in the forum of the Gateway Group, any new proposition. Nor should these discussions hold up the immediate cessation of Activity-Based Costing. The estimate is that this measure alone will release the equivalent of 110 full-time police officers and 35 full-time police staff each year.
- ii) Secondly, we propose some urgent changes to the collection of police workforce data, moving to biannual rather than quarterly collections. This is an interim step, pending the introduction of the Data Hub. It should save up to four weeks each year for those in police forces who prepare this data for the Home Office. When the Data Hub is introduced, this burden should be removed altogether because a special collection and collation of the data for Home Office purposes will no longer be needed.

- iii) Thirdly, we are proposing to remove, reduce or downgrade to voluntary collection a number of other existing data streams (a full list of these is in the annex to this report).
- iv) Fourthly, the NPIA has, as part of this review, undertaken a parallel programme of reviewing its data collection burden. This has already resulted in a reduction in the collection of forensics performance data by a third, halving the information required to progress mobile data initiatives and a proposal for a 30 per cent cut in the current data sets in the National Standard Incident data collection (pending consultation requirements).

Further work is under way in the NPIA, under the direction of Deputy Chief Constable Jim Barker-McCardle, to review other data requirements with a view to reducing and removing those which duplicate existing data. This work will be completed by April 2009.

23. Finally, this review has not specifically covered the work of **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)**, although they have been consulted about this review and commented on its findings. Clearly HMIC relies on good, accurate and comparative data for its inspections and may need to seek special or urgent data from a force in the course of a review or inspection. We do not want to inhibit that in any way: it is essential to the independent inspectorate we want to protect and strengthen. But, equally, HMIC will need to be aware of the data requirements imposed through its own inspection processes and do everything possible, in line with the principles of the review, to use existing data, rather than require special collections. We propose that they should be represented on the Gateway Group, so that they can contribute to the overall effort to reduce national data collection burdens.

CONCLUSION

24. We have sought in this review both to reduce immediately data collection requirements from the Home Office and to lay the basis for going further. It is impossible to quantify exactly the precise scale of the reduction proposed. But we believe that the immediate changes we are proposing will reduce the burden by, on average, about a third, with the longer-term changes, including the Data Hub, getting it close to 50 per cent or even further.
25. We see this review as the start of a process, not the end. The moratorium on new requirements and the new Gateway process are designed to ensure that new burdens are rare and that further scope for reduction is identified. It should also provide a forum for data burdens created by other parts of central government or its agencies to be identified and tackled. But, in addition, we hope this review will provide strong encouragement to police authorities and police forces themselves to carry out similar reviews of the self-imposed burdens, which undoubtedly exist.

Annex

Data stream proposed by the Home Office	Action – cessation, reduction
Phase 1: by 31 March 2009	
Activity-Based Costing data.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Explosives certificates data.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Dispersal Orders data.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Fitness tests data.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Data fields relating to statutory performance indicators for domestic violence (DV) arrest rate, domestic burglaries, partner-on-partner DV arrests.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Data fields relating to uncertified assault/non-assault.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Data fields relating to special hours worked.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Compensation claims breakdown by number of claims, progress and outcome of claims and category of discrimination.	Cessation. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Secondments breakdown by rank, gender, where seconded, higher-level ethnicity.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Long-term absence breakdown by reason for absence, rank and gender.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Sickness absence breakdown of officers and support staff into three categories of sickness.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Quarterly reconciliation of police strength by rank and gender data.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Joining breakdown by rank, gender and higher-level ethnicity data.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Leaving breakdown by reason for leaving, gender, rank and higher-level ethnicity data.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Sickness absence/Basic Command Unit (BCU) breakdown of officers and support staff by hours lost to hours available, by BCU data.	Reduced from quarterly to six-monthly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.

Data stream proposed by the Home Office	Action – cessation or reduction
Police staff joining and leaving data.	Reduced from quarterly to yearly collection. Forces informed in 2009/10 ADR notice.
Forensics data collection reduction by at least 33 per cent.	Reduced. 12 data sets identified for immediate removal subject to ACPO approval.
Neighbourhood policing teams resource tracker.	Cessation. To be replaced by a streamlined process by 31 March 2009.
Home Office survey of police community support officer powers.	Cessation. No request for 2009/10.
Domestic extremism measures.	Cessation. Removed from Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) framework for 2009/10.
National Indicator Set – NI 24 and 25.	Cessation. Home Office proposal to include in the National Indicator Set withdrawn with immediate effect.
NPIA mobile data requirement alignment.	Reduction. The NPIA has reduced the reporting on device roll-out by 50 per cent, and the reporting of business benefits is being designed around local information that forces have available or collect themselves.
NPIA Serious Crime Analysis System (SCAS) survey removal.	Reduced. The NPIA has replaced the requirement for forces to complete the lengthy questionnaire with a simpler and more effective photocopy and case file process, reducing the data requirement by 80 per cent.
National Standards of Incident Recording (NSIR) data reduction.	Reduced. The NSIR data set for 2009/10 will be reduced by 33 per cent.
Stop and account.	Reduced. With effect from 1 January 2009, forces only required to record ethnicity.
Individuals' court records obtained from police forces.	Cessation. Libra case management system now used by OCJR to obtain the information instead of using manual data from forces and ad hoc court systems.
Phase 2: 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010	
Motoring offences: vehicle defect rectification scheme notices data.	Cessation. The Home Office proposes to cease the requirement for 2010/11 onwards and move to voluntary collection.

Data stream proposed by the Home Office	Action – cessation, reduction or downgrading to voluntary collection
Motoring offences: returns of written warnings and cautions data.	Cessation. The Home Office proposes to cease the requirement from 2010/11 onwards and move to voluntary collection.
Stop and search.	Reduced. Building on the approach to stop and account, the Home Office is looking at reducing recording requirements to core monitoring information.
Vehicles stolen during robberies and domestic burglaries.	Cessation. The Home Office proposes to cease data collection in 2009.
Summary figures and individual details of road traffic accidents involving the police.	Cessation. To be removed from the ADR requirement as soon as practicable.
Summary figures and individual details of police use of authorised firearms.	Cessation. The Home Office proposes to cease data collection in 2009.
Return of cautions: individual records of adults given a simple or conditional caution or juveniles given a reprimand or warning obtained from police (ADR).	Cessation. Proposal for OCJR to obtain the information from the Police National Computer instead of direct from forces.
Regional custody fora work programme.	Reduction. The secretariat to be provided by ACPO/ NPIA from January 2009, and future work will be integrated into NPIA workstreams with the intention to reduce further the data requirements.
NPIA workstream – benefits realisation.	Reduction. To introduce a system of cross-sampling of forces for information by December 2009 rather than make requests across the whole service.
NPIA workstream – to reduce the NPIA data collection required from forces.	Reduction. To examine further existing data streams to reduce the amount of force data required.
NPIA workstream – reusing data.	Reduction. To reduce requests for data by reusing force data across the NPIA and with the Home Office and HMIC by April 2010.



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