

Why Did the NPCC Take Control of All COVID-Related FOI Disclosures Across the UK?

An Explanation

Introduction

One of the most revealing issues to emerge from the Operation Talla evidence is this:

Why did the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) seek to take control of every police force's FOI responses relating to COVID-19?

Normally, each police force in the UK responds to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests independently.

This is how the system is designed - FOI is meant to protect the public's right to know by preventing centralised control over information.

But during the COVID period, something unusual happened.

Across all COVID-related topics, including vaccine complaints, Operation Talla, crime reporting, protests and internal decision-making, FOI responses were intended to be coordinated or controlled by the NPCC, a body which has no statutory power to direct police forces and is not subject to democratic oversight.

This paper explains, in simple terms, why that happened and why it matters.

1. FOI: A System Built for Transparency

FOI law exists so the public can find out what government bodies are doing.

It requires police forces to:

- answer questions honestly,
- disclose records where lawful, and
- act independently of political influence.

Centralised control defeats the purpose of FOI entirely.

So why did the NPCC seek to take control?

2. What the Evidence Shows

From the documents now released, including the Speirs Directive and multiple NPCC FOI bundles received, we can see a clear pattern:

A. The NPCC was “managing” FOI disclosures for all COVID topics

Police forces across the UK issued near-identical FOI replies, often word-for-word.

B. Requests were labelled “*vexatious*” even when completely reasonable

This happened repeatedly, especially when the questions concerned vaccine-related crime reports or Operation Talla.

C. NPCC internal documents contradict their public statements

For example, the NPCC publicly denied the existence of:

- a national instruction,
- any role in suppressing crime recording,
- any connection with Operation Talla decisions.

But internal documents and Police Scotland's Speirs Directive, show the exact opposite.

D. The NPCC discussed "*guidance not to record*" certain crime reports

This was in internal emails and briefing materials.

This is exactly the kind of information which would have been revealed if forces had answered FOI requests independently.

3. So Why Centralise FOI? Here Are the Plain-English Reasons

Based on everything now known, there are six powerful reasons why the NPCC needed to control disclosure.

1. To Prevent the Public Discovering the Non-Recording Policy

The public were being told that police would accept reports as usual.

Inside the system, however, Operation Talla guidance, including the Speirs Directive, told officers, in effect:

- do not record,
- do not investigate, and
- do not issue crime numbers
- for certain categories of reports relating to the vaccine programme.

If 43+ different police forces answered FOI requests honestly and independently, this secret would have collapsed immediately.

2. To Keep the Narrative the Same Everywhere

The greatest threat to the operation was inconsistency.

If one police force disclosed:

“Yes, we were told not to record those reports,”

while another force said:

“No, we received no national instruction,”

the contradiction would expose the truth.

Centralisation kept everyone on the same script.

3. To Protect Senior Officials From Accountability

FOI is one of the few tools the public have to expose:

- wrongdoing,
- poor leadership,
- illegal directives,
- national interference in local policing.

If individual forces had disclosed the reality of what they were ordered to do, senior officials at national level could have faced:

- legal consequences,
- disciplinary action,
- parliamentary scrutiny.

Centralised control protected them.

4. To Prevent Legal Challenges and Judicial Reviews

If the truth about Operation Talla and the national suppression of crime reports had emerged in real time, it would have triggered:

- multiple judicial reviews,
- civil claims,
- Article 2 investigations (risk to life),
- claims of misfeasance and nonfeasance in public office.

The NPCC needed to prevent this.

Controlling FOI was an effective barrier.

5. To Prevent Contradictions With Evidence Given to the COVID Inquiry

Senior officers told the Inquiry:

- there was “no national instruction,”
- Operation Talla was not a command structure,
- forces acted independently.

If FOI disclosures from local forces contradicted this, the Inquiry would have been forced to reopen lines of questioning, or accuse witnesses of misleading the Inquiry.

Centralised control avoided that.

6. To Protect the Narrative, “Everything Was Lawful”

The Speirs Directive and other evidence show that:

- unlawful suppression of crime recording occurred,
- it was UK-wide,
- it involved national bodies,
- it had constitutional implications.

The NPCC knew that independent FOI responses would expose all of this.

So FOI decisions and advice had to be centrally controlled.

4. What This Means for the Public

The NPCC's control over COVID-related FOI responses shows that:

- Police transparency was compromised - FOI was used to conceal, not reveal.
- The public were misled - Requests were labelled “*vexatious*” or denied to prevent factual disclosure.
- Constitutional safeguards collapsed - Policing became centralised without legal authority.
- The independence of local forces was undermined - Forces did not act freely; they followed a national script.
- Serious allegations of crime were shielded from scrutiny

And the public were deprived of truth.

5. Conclusion: The Question That Reveals the Truth

So why did the NPCC need to control all COVID-related FOI disclosures across the UK?

Because independent disclosures would have:

- exposed unlawful national directives,
- contradicted the public story,
- undermined senior leadership,
- triggered legal consequences,
- revealed the collapse of proper policing standards.

FOI control was not about efficiency.

It was not about coordination.

It was not about public confidence.

It was about protecting a narrative and preventing the truth from emerging too soon, or perhaps at all.

Now that the truth is emerging, the scale of the constitutional issue is becoming impossible to ignore.

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2 December 2025