

Operation Talla

What every police employee should know

What it was (public-facing):

Operation Talla was the NPCC-co-ordinated policing response to COVID-19 across the UK. It set national rhythm, Gold/Silver/Bronze command and emphasised the “4Es” approach (Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce). The NPCC also centralised COVID-related FOI handling and used a pre-announced publication strategy under section 22 of the FOI Act to control timing of releases. Police issued and processed COVID Fixed Penalty Notices under this framework.

What was less visible:

FOI control: NPCC required forces to refer COVID-related FOIs to the NPCC FOI & Data Protection Unit and explicitly planned to rely on s.22 “intention to publish” to delay disclosure until a chosen publication point.

Scotland’s CVI logging: Police Scotland built the Coronavirus Intervention (CVI) system to log COVID interactions for analysis by an Independent Advisory Group. This data underpinned Talla oversight but wasn’t widely understood outside command/policy circles.

How a “suppression” element came to light:

FOI material shows that on 25 January 2022, ACC Alan Speirs (then Talla Silver, Police Scotland) circulated a statement about vaccine-related intimidation which, as described in subsequent FOI correspondence, instructed officers not to accept certain public reports about the COVID-19 vaccine programme and to route entries via intelligence/CVI systems instead.

Status today:

Requests and correspondence in mid-2025 still cite the 25 Jan 2022 directive and seek force records tied to Talla/Norden logging-indicating the effects of those instructions may still be operating unless formally withdrawn.

Why this matters to you (personal risk):

Crime recording & “refusing reports”: Where members of the public attempt to report alleged criminality, blanket refusal or re-routing that prevents recording may breach crime-recording rules.

CPIA duties: Once a criminal investigation is underway, officers must record, retain and reveal material that may

be relevant. Any practice that sidelines or deletes relevant material risks breaching the CPIA Code of Practice.

CPIA Code of Practice (2015):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-procedure-and-investigations-act-code-of-practice>

CPIA 1996

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/25/contents>

Ethical duties & whistleblowing: The College of Policing Code of Ethics applies to all police personnel; protected-disclosure routes exist if you are instructed to act unlawfully.

College of Policing Code of Ethics:

<https://www.college.police.uk/ethics/code-of-ethics>

Immediate, practical steps for officers & staff (including civilian staff):

1. Check current orders in writing. Locate any local policy/Gold/Silver orders still in force regarding vaccine-related reports and Talla/Norden/CVI entries. Keep copies.

2. Record first, escalate fast. Where a member of the public alleges an offence, ensure the matter is properly recorded under your force's crime-recording standard before any onward routing.

3. Preserve material. If an investigation starts, apply CPIA: retain notes, CAD logs, emails and any submitted evidence; do not delete or divert.

CPIA Code:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-procedure-and-investigations-act-code-of-practice>

4. Seek independent advice. If an instruction appears to block lawful recording/investigation, seek independent legal/union/Police Federation advice and consider protected-disclosure routes.

5. Act within the Code of Ethics. Decisions should be objectively justifiable and capable of audit (integrity/openness/accountability).

College of Policing Code:

<https://www.college.police.uk/ethics/code-of-ethics>

The Bottom Line

Operation Talla formalised COVID policing and comms; however, FOI-evidenced instructions, particularly the 25 Jan 2022 Scotland directive, created a real risk that some vaccine-related complaints were not treated as crime reports. If such practices persist, command-level policy may place individual employees at legal and disciplinary risk. Take steps now to ensure your actions comply with crime-recording standards, CPIA and the Code of Ethics and obtain independent advice if in doubt.

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Ethical Approach UK

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