

The Solicitors Regulation Authority, Operation Talla and the Erosion of Professional Justice

Executive Summary

This paper examines the Solicitors Regulation Authority's (SRA) handling of disciplinary proceedings against solicitors Philip Hyland and Lois Bayliss in relation to statements they made concerning Crime Reference Number (CRN) 6029679/21.

It demonstrates that the SRA's actions cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, they sit within a wider institutional environment created by Operation Talla, in which policing bodies departed from ordinary crime-recording and investigative duties, delayed disclosure of critical decisions and asserted positions which were later shown to be materially inaccurate.

On the evidence now in the public domain, the SRA relied upon Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) assertions that no investigation existed. Those assertions were wrong in law and misleading in fact.

The SRA's acceptance of them resulted in serious professional jeopardy to solicitors who were, in substance, correct.

This paper argues that the SRA thereby became an unwitting (or insufficiently critical) participant in a broader pattern of institutional narrative-protection, with profound implications for professional regulation, access to justice and constitutional integrity.

1. Background: CRN 6029679/21 and the Public Record

On 20 December 2021, a report alleging serious criminal conduct was submitted to the Metropolitan Police Service. A Crime Reference Number, CRN 6029679/21, was issued.

Under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (CPIA) and its Code of Practice, the moment police seek to ascertain whether a crime may have been committed, a criminal investigation exists as a matter of law.

Subsequent disclosures now show that:

- The matter was treated internally as legally sensitive and system-wide in scope;
- The MPS referred the case internally to its Directorate of Legal Services for advice relating to closure;
- A decision to close the matter was reached weeks before any closure letter was issued to complainants;
- National policing structures, including the NPCC under Operation Talla, were engaged.

Yet publicly, and for a prolonged period, the MPS asserted that there was “*no investigation.*”

2. The SRA Proceedings Against Hyland and Bayliss

In 2022 the SRA recommended referral of Lois Bayliss and Philip Hyland to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal.

Central to the allegations against them was the claim that the solicitors had misrepresented the status of CRN 6029679/21 by asserting that a live criminal investigation existed.

The SRA relied upon representations from the Metropolitan Police that no investigation was underway.

This reliance is critical.

Evidently, the SRA must not have taken care to independently test the legal meaning of “investigation” under CPIA, nor did it interrogate whether the police’s assertion was compatible with:

- The issuance of a CRN;
- The assessment and review of evidence by police;
- The involvement of senior legal oversight within the MPS;
- The delayed communication of a closure decision.

Official SRA documentation in our possession indicates that the SRA repeatedly relied upon police assertions concerning the existence and status of a criminal investigation, without undertaking independent verification. In doing so, any inaccuracy or incompleteness in the police account was necessarily

imported directly into the SRA's own disciplinary decision-making.

In effect, the SRA appears to have adopted a policing narrative at face value.

3. Why the Police Assertion Was Legally Impossible

The CPIA Code of Practice defines a criminal investigation to include investigations whose purpose is to ascertain whether a crime has been committed, with a view to the possible institution of criminal proceedings.

There is no lawful concept in CPIA of:

- “Assessment without investigation”
- “Initial review but no investigation”
- “Triage outside CPIA”
- “Policy screening before investigation”

Accordingly, once the MPS received the allegation and considered the evidential material to determine whether criminality might be disclosed, an investigation existed by operation of law. The solicitors' statements were therefore entirely correct.

The MPS position, relied upon by the SRA, was not merely debatable but legally untenable.

4. Operation Talla and Institutional Narrative Control

Operation Talla created a national command framework in which Covid-related matters were managed centrally. Evidence now shows that:

- Certain categories of allegations were diverted away from normal crime-recording pathways;
- Decisions were aligned across policing bodies outside judicial scrutiny;
- Legal meaning was settled internally rather than tested in court;
- Disclosure to affected parties was delayed or incomplete.

Within such a framework, it is unsurprising that external regulators encountered a distorted picture. However, professional regulators exist precisely to resist untested institutional assertions, not to amplify them.

5. The SRA's Regulatory Failure

The SRA's handling of this matter exposes several failures:

1. Failure of Legal Analysis

The SRA failed to apply the statutory definition of “criminal investigation” under CPIA.

2. Failure of Independence

It must have accepted police assertions without forensic scrutiny, despite the obvious reputational interest of the police in denying investigative status.

3. Failure of Proportionality

It pursued severe disciplinary consequences against solicitors on a contested factual basis that could and should have been tested.

4. Failure of Curiosity

It did not question why a closure letter was issued weeks after a decision had apparently been reached.

In consequence, the SRA acted on an incomplete and misleading account of events.

6. The “Bulldozing” of Lawyers

In May 2021, Dominic Cummings publicly indicated, to a Parliamentary Select Committee, that if lawyers obstructed the vaccination programme, ways would be found for Government to bulldoze them out of the way.

The treatment of Hyland and Bayliss occurred approximately eight months later.

Two solicitors, asserting the existence of a live investigation into vaccine-related allegations, found themselves subjected to regulatory sanction based on a police narrative now shown to be false.

Whether by design or coincidence, the effect was the same: lawyers raising inconvenient truths were neutralised through regulatory process.

7. Judicial Consequences

When the matter of CRN 6929679/21 later came before the Administrative Court, in 2023, the court was presented with a context in which:

- Police asserted no investigation existed;
- The broader Operation Talla framework was undisclosed.

The result was a judicial decision made on a materially incomplete constitutional record.

8. Conclusion: The SRA Within the Talla Frame

The SRA may not have designed Operation Talla, but by uncritically adopting police assertions generated within that framework, it became part of the same systemic failure.

This was not a mere regulatory misstep.

It represents a collapse of professional justice, in which the regulator tasked with upholding integrity instead punished those who spoke accurately, while insulating institutional falsehoods from challenge.

The implications extend far beyond two solicitors.

They strike at the heart of regulatory independence, the rule of law and the ability of professionals to speak truthfully without fear when institutions themselves are in error.

This now raises the constitutional severity of what has been uncovered.

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