

How British Police “Shot Themselves in the Foot” With Operation Talla

Introduction

Operation Talla was launched as the UK policing national response to COVID-19. It was intended to provide structure, consistency and resilience during a period of emergency. Yet what has since emerged through Freedom of Information (FOI) disclosures and police contradictions is a story not of competence, but of utter cover-up.

Instead of building trust, Operation Talla has left policing open to accusations of unlawful suppression, constitutional breach and reputational self-sabotage. In short: **British policing has shot itself in the foot.**

1. The Speirs Directive (January 2022)

Police Scotland confirmed, via FOI, that Assistant Chief Constable Alan Speirs issued a directive instructing officers:

Reject all public reports relating to COVID-19 vaccines

Log them only under internal codes (Operation Norden / Operation Talla)

Do not treat them as crimes

This was explicit, categorical, and critically, done on the advice of the NPCC and UK Gold Command.

The effect: every force in the UK was instructed to turn away members of the public reporting concerns about vaccines. This went far beyond “prioritisation” - it was a blanket refusal to investigate allegations of criminality.

2. The NPCC Contradictions (2025)

When challenged, the NPCC has since claimed:

“No blanket approach existed.”

“Each force retained discretion.”

“Matters would have been considered case by case.”

But this directly contradicts the written directive confirmed by Police Scotland. The NPCC’s shifting story exposes policing to the charge of attempting to rewrite history.

3. Legal and Constitutional Consequences

Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (s.23(1)):
By refusing reports, police forces denied themselves the chance to retain or disclose relevant material. That is a potential statutory breach.

Fettering of Discretion: Officers were stripped of their legal duty to consider allegations on their merits. Administrative law does not permit blanket refusals.

Policing by Consent: Public trust relies on fair access to justice. By turning away citizens, policing undermined its own legitimacy.

4. The “Own Goal” of Secrecy

What police forces celebrated publicly as a success, complete with awards ceremonies in London and even medals in Jersey, is now surrounded by secrecy. FOI requests are met with contradictions, denials, or “not held” responses.

Instead of demonstrating professionalism, this secrecy has highlighted systemic failure. The very attempt to bury Operation Talla’s directives has instead blown the cover from policing’s constitutional contradictions.

5. The Lesson

Operation Talla was supposed to demonstrate national leadership. Instead, it has revealed:

A blurred line between policing and politics

A failure to uphold statute in favour of executive instruction

An erosion of trust so deep that every denial only raises more suspicion

In the end, it is not campaigners who have undermined confidence in policing. It is the police themselves, by issuing unlawful instructions and then contradicting their own record.

Conclusion

British policing has “shot itself in the foot” with Operation Talla. In trying to suppress public reporting, it undermined its own constitutional standing. In trying to deny the directive, it exposed contradictions at the heart of national command.

Trust is not restored by secrecy or spin. It is restored by candour, accountability and respect for the law.

Operation Talla remains a case study in how not to police a democracy.

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