

Criminal Justice System Strategic Command: The Missing Command Structure in Covid-Era Justice

**A factual public report based on official CPS witness
testimony to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry**

1. Introduction

During the Covid-19 period, public attention focused on emergency regulations, lockdowns and enforcement against individuals.

Less visible, but far more constitutionally significant, was the emergence of centralised command structures governing how the criminal justice system itself would function.

One such structure was the ***Criminal Justice System Strategic Command (CJSSC)***.

This report explains:

- what CJSSC was,
- how it operated,
- how it intersected with policing responses such as Operation Talla,
- and why its existence matters when allegations concerned the state itself.

All facts set out below are drawn from official CPS witness testimony to the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.

2. What was CJSSC?

CJSSC was a cross-government, multi-agency command structure established to manage crises affecting the criminal justice system during the pandemic.

According to CPS testimony, CJSSC:

- took overall responsibility for multi-agency criminal justice management;

- established a common strategic and policy framework for participating bodies;
- fed directly into senior Cabinet-level committees.

It was not advisory. It was command-level.

3. Who was involved

CJSSC included senior representatives from:

- the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS),
- policing leadership and coordination bodies,
- government departments,
- public health authorities.

Within CJSSC:

- CPS Directors of Legal Services chaired key legal decision-making groups;
- decisions were taken at executive, not caseworker, level.

4. How CJSSC operated

CJSSC operated through a Gold-Silver-Bronze command model, familiar from emergency response.

Of particular importance was the Legal Decision-Making Silver Group, whose stated purpose included:

- delaying legal decisions,
- reducing the number of legal decisions taken,
- widening who could take legal decisions.

This is not rhetoric. It is an explicit operational objective recorded in sworn testimony.

5. CJSSC and Operation Talla

CJSSC did not operate in isolation. It existed alongside Operation Talla, the national policing response to Covid-19.

Both systems:

- involved the same senior legal and policing actors,
- prioritised national consistency,
- relied on informal, rapid coordination,
- lacked comprehensive auditable records,
- and functioned outside direct judicial scrutiny.

Together, they created an environment in which legal questions could be resolved internally and operationalised nationally.

6. The accountability gap

CJSSC was designed to:

- maintain system capacity,
- prevent overload,
- ensure consistency.

It was not designed to ensure:

- independent investigation of allegations against the state,

- timely judicial oversight,
- or transparency when legality itself was contested.

When allegations concerned public authorities or senior officials, the system:

- assessed them internally,
- settled legal positions administratively,
- and filtered them out before courts were engaged.

7. Why courts mattered - and were absent

In a constitutional democracy:

- courts decide legality, not committees or command structures.

CJSSC's own description shows a system capable of:

- managing law,
- prioritising outcomes,
- and shaping enforcement,

without courts being asked to rule.

That is the central problem.

8. Why this matters now

CJSSC did not end with Covid. It sets a precedent.

If, in a future so called crisis:

- legality can be managed internally,
- allegations against the state resolved administratively,
- and courts bypassed,

then the rule of law becomes conditional.

9. Conclusion

Based on official CPS testimony, CJSSC was a powerful, central command structure which shaped how justice functioned during Covid-19.

It explains how:

- legal decisions could be delayed or reduced,
- national positions could be settled quickly,
- and accountability could be managed away from public view.

CJSSC is the missing command structure in Covid-era justice and understanding it is essential if constitutional integrity is to be restored.

Ian Clayton

11 December 2025