

From:

Ethical Approach UK

To:

UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

Date: 7 January 2026 at 20:15

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Notice of Material Contradictions on the Inquiry Record - Operation Talla Governance

I write respectfully and in the public interest, to place before the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry a short analytical report identifying a number of material contradictions and unresolved anomalies which now appear on the Inquiry's own public record concerning the origin, authority and governance of Operation Talla.

This correspondence is not a submission, does not seek findings and does not invite the Inquiry to take any procedural step. It is provided solely to ensure that the Inquiry is formally sighted on matters arising from sworn evidence and counsel submissions already before it, for such consideration as the Inquiry may deem appropriate.

1. The enclosed document

The attached report, titled:

"The NPCC, the Anomalies and the Inquiry" is confined strictly to:

- sworn testimony given to the Inquiry,
- oral submissions made by King's Counsel on behalf of Core Participants, and
- official Inquiry transcripts and exhibits.

It identifies mutually incompatible accounts on the Inquiry record regarding:

- when Operation Talla was established,
- by whom it was established,
- under what authority it operated, and
- how it functioned as a national command structure.

These inconsistencies are not peripheral. They go to the constitutional character of Operation Talla itself.

2. Nature of the anomalies identified

By way of summary only, the report highlights that the Inquiry record presently contains:

- sworn evidence asserting national NPCC Gold Command leadership from March 2020;
- oral submissions by King's Counsel asserting that Operation Talla was established by Police Scotland in January 2020;
- subsequent command directives treating Operation Talla as a UK-wide authority structure; and
- no clear reconciliation of these positions within the Inquiry's own published material.

The report also notes the absence of any visible indication, on the public record, that these contradictions have been examined, tested, or clarified by the Inquiry itself.

3. Purpose of this notice

This notice is provided:

- without allegation of bad faith,
- without criticism of the Inquiry,
- and without expectation of response.

Its sole purpose is to ensure that the Inquiry is aware of the existence of these documented anomalies on its own record, given their potential relevance to public

confidence, institutional accountability and the constitutional context within which the matters under examination arose.

Whether the Inquiry considers that any further reflection or clarification is required is entirely a matter for the Inquiry.

4. Public interest

The matters raised concern:

- the clarity of national policing authority during a period of emergency,
- the relationship between executive coordination and judicial oversight and the integrity and coherence of the Inquiry's evidential record.

For those reasons, this notice is submitted in the public interest and with appropriate constitutional restraint.

I would be grateful if this correspondence and the attached document could be retained on the Inquiry's record in such manner as the Inquiry considers appropriate.

Yours faithfully

Ian Clayton

Lead Investigator

Ethical Approach UK

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Attachment:

the_npcc_the_anomalies_and_the_inquiry.pdf

Recorded Contradictions in the Origin, Authority and Governance of Operation Talla and the Absence of Inquiry Resolution within a Statutory Public Inquiry

1. Purpose and Scope of This Report

This report examines material contradictions now present on the official record of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry concerning the origin, command authority and governance structure of the policing framework known as Operation Talla.

The analysis is confined strictly to sworn testimony, formal submissions by King's Counsel and disclosed documentary evidence already before the Inquiry. No allegation of bad faith is made against any individual or institution. The purpose is to identify objective anomalies, assess their constitutional and legal significance and consider the Inquiry's apparent failure to address or reconcile them.

2. The Central Contradiction on the Record

2.1 Statement by Counsel to the NPCC

In Module 2A (Scotland) of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, Rory Phillips KC, appearing as Counsel for the National Police Chiefs' Council, stated in opening submissions that:

Police Scotland established a formal response to the pandemic at a very early stage, with the setting up of Operation Talla in January 2020.

This statement is:

made by a King's Counsel, on behalf of a national policing body, in a statutory public inquiry and preserved as part of the official Inquiry record.

It places:

origination with Police Scotland, timing in January 2020 and status as a formal operational response.

2.2 Sworn Evidence of NPCC Gold Commander

This account is irreconcilable with sworn oral evidence given by Martin Hewitt, former Chair of the NPCC and designated Gold Commander of Operation Talla, who testified that:

- Operation Talla was established in early March 2020;
- it arose following national coordination discussions between Chief Constables;
- it was a UK-wide NPCC-led operation, not force-initiated; and

- it was designed as a national coordination framework, not a pre-existing force operation.

Both versions cannot simultaneously be accurate.

3. The Position of Police Scotland and Alan Speirs

3.1 The Speirs Directive

Assistant Chief Constable Alan Speirs issued a directive dated 25 January 2022, later disclosed under FOI, which states expressly that it was issued:

on the advice of the National Police Chiefs' Council and the UK Gold Command.

This directive:

- treats Operation Talla as an existing national command authority;
- presumes settled national legal conclusions regarding crime reports;
- instructs officers to reject certain categories of reports;
- diverts those reports into SID/CVI systems, rather than crime recording; and
- implicitly treats the reporting of alleged crime as potentially improper conduct.

3.2 The Temporal Incompatibility

If Operation Talla was:

established by Police Scotland in January 2020 (per Phillips KC), then Alan Speirs could be seen as operating under a pre-existing Police Scotland-initiated structure.

If, however, Operation Talla was:

established nationally by the NPCC in March 2020 (per Hewitt), then the Speirs Directive represents force-level reliance on a national command structure that itself has uncertain provenance.

The Inquiry record currently does not resolve which of these positions is correct.

4. Absence of Institutional Clarity

4.1 What the Record Shows

Taken together, the Inquiry record now contains:

- a KC attributing origination to Police Scotland (January 2020);
- a Gold Commander attributing origination to NPCC national coordination (March 2020);
- a senior Scottish commander acting on NPCC and UK Gold advice in 2022;

And no documentary evidence clarifying:

- who authorised Operation Talla,
- under what legal instrument,
- with what defined remit,

- and subject to what oversight.

The effect is that no institution appears, on the record, to hold a coherent or settled account of Operation Talla's legal genesis.

5. The Role of the Statutory Public Inquiry

5.1 The Inquiry's Mandate

A statutory public inquiry exists to:

- establish facts,
- resolve contradictions,
- test institutional accounts, and
- restore public confidence through clarity.

5.2 The Evident Gap

Despite the contradictions being:

- explicit,
- material,
- sworn,
- and central to national policing authority,

there is no indication on the Inquiry record that:

- witnesses were recalled to reconcile accounts;
- counsel were questioned on inconsistencies;
- findings were made on origination or authority; or
- the Inquiry sought documentary corroboration.

This absence is itself constitutionally significant.

6. Legal and Constitutional Implications

If unresolved, these contradictions give rise to serious issues:

- Ultra vires command risk
- A policing command structure may have operated without lawful foundation.
- Absence of accountability
- No institution appears able to state definitively who was responsible.
- Judicial displacement
- Courts were sidelined while legality was settled internally.
- Inquiry sufficiency concerns

The Inquiry record contains unresolved contradictions of high materiality.

7. Conclusion

This report does not allege misconduct.

It establishes that:

- the official record of a statutory public inquiry contains unresolved and mutually incompatible accounts of the origin and authority of Operation Talla;

- those contradictions directly affect the lawfulness of policing decisions taken under that framework; and
- the Inquiry itself appears not to have interrogated or resolved those contradictions.

Where a public inquiry leaves foundational anomalies unexamined, the responsibility to note them does not disappear. It transfers to the record.

Final Observation

The issue is no longer whether Operation Talla was justified.

It is whether any institution can now say, with certainty, what it was, who authorised it and under what law it operated.

At present, the Inquiry record does not provide that answer.

Ian Clayton

7 January 2026