

# The Evolution of National Police Leadership

## An Observational Public Interest Note

### Ethical Approach UK

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#### Introduction

Over the past several years, Ethical Approach UK has undertaken an independent documentary examination of policing during the Covid-19 era.

That work has centred upon Operation Talla, the United Kingdom's nationally coordinated policing response to the pandemic.

The investigation has not sought to determine criminal liability. It has examined how policing structures, national coordination and operational decision-making evolved during one of the most significant periods in modern policing.

Recent official publications concerning police leadership provide an opportunity to compare our independently

documented findings with the direction now openly proposed for policing.

This short paper simply draws attention to those common themes.

## **What the Operation Talla Investigation Found**

Our investigation has consistently identified documentary evidence demonstrating increasing national coordination during the Covid-19 response.

Official documents showed, amongst other matters:

- national strategic coordination through Operation Talla;
- increasing reliance upon nationally produced guidance;
- communication through the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC);
- common operational approaches being disseminated across forces;
- emphasis upon consistency of policing practice;
- growing strategic coordination beyond individual police force boundaries.

These observations were derived from official correspondence, Freedom of Information disclosures and published operational material examined over several years.

## The Newly Published Leadership Review

Now, in July 2026, the Police Leadership Commission has published what has been described as the most significant examination of police leadership for a generation.

Its conclusions are notable.

Rather than proposing greater local variation, the report repeatedly recommends stronger national structures.

Amongst its recommendations are:

- national leadership standards;
- nationally coordinated ethical policing;
- nationally coordinated professional development;
- greater strategic consistency;
- enhanced national leadership capability;
- a stronger role for the proposed National Police Service;
- national foresight capability for future crises.

The accompanying Ministerial Statement similarly describes the proposed National Police Service as providing:

*"a single source of strategic leadership and a stronger set of national standards."*

## An Earlier Study

The direction now proposed should also be viewed alongside an earlier study commissioned by the NPCC during Operation Talla.

In 2022, University College London's Dawes Centre for Future Crime published

*“Covid-19 and Future Threats: A Law Enforcement Delphi Study”*

commissioned by the NPCC in consultation with Operation Talla.

That study recognised Operation Talla as the national policing coordination structure and recommended:

- continued national coordination;
- national foresight capability;
- stronger strategic learning;
- nationally coordinated communication;
- national preparedness for future disruptions;
- continued central coordination where emerging threats arise.

Those recommendations now appear strikingly consistent with many of the themes contained within the Police Leadership Commission's report.

## Why This Matters

None of these publications state that national coordination is inherently good or inherently bad. Nor do they determine whether decisions made during the Covid-19 period were correct.

They do, however, demonstrate a clear and continuing direction of travel.

That direction is towards:

- greater national strategic leadership;
- increased national consistency;
- nationally coordinated operational learning;
- nationally coordinated ethical frameworks;
- stronger central leadership structures.

These themes are remarkably similar to those independently identified throughout Ethical Approach UK's Operation Talla investigation.

## An Independent Observation

One of the recurring criticisms directed at independent research has been that Operation Talla represented merely a temporary emergency response with little lasting constitutional significance.

The publication of these later official reports however, suggests otherwise.

They indicate that many of the organisational developments first observed during Operation Talla are now being openly discussed as permanent features of future policing.

Whether that evolution ultimately strengthens policing, weakens policing, or simply changes its constitutional character is a matter upon which reasonable people may differ.

The documentary evidence, however, increasingly points in one direction - Operation Talla appears to have been more than a temporary operational response.

It may also have represented an important stage in the continuing evolution of nationally coordinated policing within England and Wales.

## **Conclusion**

Ethical Approach UK's investigation has never sought to prove predetermined conclusions.

Its purpose has been to examine official documents as they emerge and compare them against the evolving documentary record.

The publication of the Police Leadership Commission report, together with the earlier NPCC-commissioned UCL study, demonstrates that many themes independently identified during the Operation Talla investigation have subsequently appeared within official discussions concerning the future direction of British policing.

Whether readers regard that development as desirable is entirely a matter for them.

The purpose of this note is simply to observe that the documentary record continues to evolve and that the observations made during the Operation Talla investigation increasingly find echoes within subsequent official publications.

Perhaps we are worth listening to, after all.