

## **PRESS RELEASE**

***Professional Standards bodies across three UK police jurisdictions now examining complaints arising from Covid-era policing***

***11 August 2026 at 09:15***

***For Immediate Release***

Professional Standards bodies concerning three UK police forces are now examining complaints arising from aspects of the policing response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent handling of matters connected with that period.

The developments concern the Metropolitan Police Service, Durham Constabulary and Police Scotland, the latter through complaints being considered by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

The three processes are separate. They concern different complaints, different decisions and, in some respects, different jurisdictions.

They nevertheless now exist against a common and increasingly important documentary background: the subsequent disclosure of

records concerning Operation Talla and the nationally coordinated UK policing response to Covid-19.

## **Metropolitan Police Service**

The Metropolitan Police Professional Standards Directorate is presently examining complaints connected with the handling and closure of crime reference CRN 6029679/21, originally reported at Hammersmith Police Station on 20 December 2021.

The complaints concern, among other matters, the circumstances in which allegations presented to the Metropolitan Police were assessed, handled and ultimately closed.

Since those events, substantial material originating from police sources has emerged concerning the contemporaneous handling of the report. That material raises legitimate questions concerning the extent of activity undertaken in relation to it and the consistency with which that activity has subsequently been characterised.

The Professional Standards process should not be misrepresented as itself constituting a reopening of the underlying criminal allegations. Its immediate significance is that aspects of the police handling of the matter are now being examined.

## **Durham Constabulary**

Separately, Durham Constabulary's Professional Standards department invited the submission of a formal complaint following correspondence with Detective Sergeant David Wells.

That complaint has now been formally submitted.

It concerns Durham Constabulary's handling of allegations originally brought to the force in December 2023 following evidence given to Parliament by former Downing Street adviser Dominic Cummings.

During his evidence before the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee and Science and Technology Committee on 26 May 2021, Cummings described instructions concerning the Vaccine Taskforce in striking terms:

*“Treat this like a wartime thing. Ignore rules. If lawyers get in your way, come to us and we'll find ways of bulldozing them out of your way.”*

The complaint does not proceed upon the proposition that this statement, by itself, establishes criminal conduct.

It asks instead whether the statement, subsequent events and evidence which has since emerged required the allegations reported to Durham Constabulary to receive a materially different assessment.

The evidence itself can be read in the official House of Commons transcript.

### **Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority**

There is now a third dimension.

The Scottish Police Authority is examining complaints concerning Police Scotland, including matters arising from Covid-era policing and Operation Talla.

That development is particularly significant because some of the clearest documentary evidence concerning the operation of Covid policing has emerged from Police Scotland itself.

Among the material subsequently disclosed is the January 2022 communication commonly referred to as the Speirs Directive, issued by then Assistant Chief Constable Alan Speirs.

That material has become important to the wider examination of how reports concerning Covid vaccination issues were handled, how intelligence was circulated and what role national coordination played in the operational response.

The Scottish process must, again, be treated on its own terms. The existence of complaints or their examination establishes neither misconduct nor criminality.

It does, however, mean that questions arising from Covid-era policing are no longer confined to a single force or a single Professional Standards process.

### **Three processes - one emerging national context**

The Metropolitan Police, Durham Constabulary and Scottish Police Authority processes are not one investigation.

They should not be presented as such.

Neither should the wider documentary context in which they now exist be ignored.

The Metropolitan Police matter concerns the handling of a major Covid-related crime report originating in December 2021.

The Durham complaint concerns the handling of later allegations arising partly from Government conduct during the pandemic, including Parliamentary evidence concerning instructions to “*ignore rules*” and to find ways of “bulldozing” lawyers who obstructed the Vaccine Taskforce.

The Scottish complaints arise within a jurisdiction from which important documentary evidence concerning Operation Talla and the handling of Covid-related reports has subsequently emerged.

The common evidential question therefore becomes increasingly difficult to avoid:

*To what extent were decisions which appeared locally to have been made by individual police forces actually influenced by a nationally coordinated policing position?*

### **Operation Talla changes the evidential landscape**

That question can now be asked because the documentary landscape has changed.

Records concerning Operation Talla demonstrate a substantial degree of national coordination within UK policing during the pandemic.

That fact does not establish that any particular decision was improper. Nor does national coordination itself establish misconduct.

What it does mean is that historical decisions cannot necessarily be understood adequately by examining the final decision of one police force in isolation.

The relevant questions include:

- Who made the decisions?
- What national guidance existed?
- Who authorised it?
- Which forces received it?
- What information was exchanged between forces?
- What role did national command structures perform?
- What relationship, if any, existed between those arrangements and decisions concerning the recording, assessment or investigation of allegations of criminality?
- And, critically, do the contemporaneous records support the explanations subsequently given for those decisions?

Those are questions of evidence, not conjecture.

### **Institutional accountability**

It is not suggested that the existence of any of these complaints predetermines their outcome.

Quite the contrary.

Professional Standards scrutiny is valuable precisely because it provides an opportunity for allegations and institutional explanations to be tested against the documentary record.

If the decisions taken during the pandemic were proper, lawful and unaffected by inappropriate considerations, a rigorous examination of the records should be capable of demonstrating that.

If mistakes were made, they should be acknowledged.

And if subsequently discovered documents reveal matters materially different from those previously understood, those matters should be investigated wherever the evidence leads.



What has developed is therefore significant.

London. Durham. Scotland.

Three separate Professional Standards processes concerning aspects of Covid-era policing, viewed against a documentary record which increasingly demonstrates that the policing response itself operated within a nationally coordinated structure.

The processes are separate.

The evidence must determine whether their underlying stories are.

**ENDS**

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