

OPERATION TALLA - WHAT THE EVIDENCE ACTUALLY SHOWS

There is, I think, a danger of making this more complicated than it is.

So let us begin with what the documents actually say.

Operation Talla was not simply a convenient name given to the policing response to Covid. It formed part of the national command and coordination structure through which information, intelligence and operational guidance were communicated across policing.

That much provides the setting.

The important question is what was being done within that structure and here we do not have to speculate.

On 14 February 2022, internal policing correspondence recorded the position in these terms:

“it would appear that the guidance to not record has been a success as only one additional report has been created.”

Those words deserve careful attention.

Not guidance as to how reports should be assessed.

Not guidance as to the evidential threshold for recording.

Not guidance requiring officers to examine allegations individually and determine whether a crime had been disclosed.

The expression actually used was:

“the guidance to not record”.

And we know something more.

Its operation was apparently being assessed by reference to its result. Only one additional report had been created and that fact was described as demonstrating that the guidance had been “*a success*”.

That is important because it takes us beyond coincidence.

If police forces independently considered individual allegations upon their merits and independently decided whether each should be recorded, the small number of reports created might simply represent the aggregate result of those individual decisions.

But, that is not what the contemporary correspondence says.

It identifies guidance.

It identifies the object of that guidance: “*not [to] record*”.

And it identifies the paucity of reports subsequently created as evidence of its success.

There is then the question whether this remained merely a discussion at national level or whether it translated into operational policing.

For that, we turn to Scotland.

On 25 January 2022, ACC Alan Speirs, himself identified as Operation Talla Silver Commander, issued guidance concerning members of the public attending police stations in connection with alleged Covid-related criminality.

The operative instruction was strikingly simple:

“these requests should be rejected”.

But what followed is perhaps more revealing still.

The information was not necessarily to disappear. A SID intelligence entry was to be made for Operation Norden and:

“Operation Talla should be informed via a CVI entry.”

Consider what that means in practical terms.

Information could enter the police system.

It could become intelligence.

It could be communicated to Operation Talla.

It could therefore remain known to policing.

And yet, it need not become a formally recorded criminal report.

That distinction matters.

It matters because once understood, it explains how policing could possess information about allegations whilst the number of formally created reports remained exceptionally small.

There is then a further piece of evidence.

Not an email.

Not a retrospective recollection.

Not an interpretation placed upon a document years afterwards.

A video.

On 30 March 2024, members of the public attended a Police Scotland station seeking to hand over what they described as “*very serious witness statements*”.

The officer asked whether the papers concerned vaccinations.

He then said:

“Assistant Chief Constable Alan Spears has issued instructions to the Police Service of Scotland that we are not to take any requests of this matter, we are not to deal with it...”

And, lest there be any ambiguity about how the officer himself understood the position, he described it as:

“the official police rule.”

He subsequently said that the instruction applied to:

“the whole of Police Scotland.” 

Now place that evidence beside what Police Scotland subsequently said.

In November 2025, DCC Speirs maintained that the guidance:

“did not preclude officers from dealing with credible criminal complaints”

and that there was:

“no evidence to suggest that legitimate criminal reports were filtered out”.

One does not need rhetoric to identify the difficulty.

The later assurance is that credible criminal complaints were not precluded.

The contemporaneous operational evidence records a police officer confronted with witness statements invoking the instruction as the reason why the material would not be taken.

And, there is something particularly important about that encounter.

The officer does not first examine the witness statements and reject them because they disclose no crime.

He does not ask to see the evidence and then conclude that it is incapable of supporting an allegation.

He does not conduct an assessment and thereafter determine that the material falls below some applicable threshold.

On the evidence recorded in the video, the subject matter triggers the response.

That is a materially different proposition.

The obvious question, therefore, is:

Was there a coordinated non-recording approach?

On the evidence available, that proposition no longer depends upon inference alone.

We have contemporary policing correspondence which expressly calls it:

“the guidance to not record”.

We have contemporary policing correspondence describing the creation of only one additional report as evidence that the guidance had been:

“a success”.

We have a written Police Scotland instruction requiring relevant requests to be:

“rejected”.

We have that same instruction requiring information nevertheless to be routed through intelligence channels and communicated to Operation Talla.

And, we have video evidence of a frontline police officer subsequently invoking the instruction as “*the official police rule*” when members of the public sought to hand over witness statements.

Put those pieces together.

The national correspondence tells us that guidance to not record existed.

The Scottish document shows us how a rejection mechanism could operate while information was nevertheless retained within policing and passed to Operation Talla.

And, of course, the video shows us what reliance upon that instruction could look like at the front counter of a police station.

That is the evidential picture.

It does not require embellishment.

Indeed, its significance lies precisely in the fact that the central propositions are not ours.

They are the words of policing itself.

Ian

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