

Pre-Operation Talla: The James Patrick Disclosures, Crime Recording Integrity and the Constitutional Management of Evidential Visibility

Author: Ian Clayton

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Executive Summary

Operation Talla has been publicly framed as an exceptional policing structure created in response to the Covid-19 emergency.

However, examination of earlier policing controversies reveals that a number of the core constitutional concerns now emerging in relation to Operation Talla were already present within British policing long before Covid-19 emerged.

Among the most significant of these earlier episodes were the disclosures made by former Metropolitan Police officer PC James Patrick concerning:

- crime recording integrity;
- the downgrading and non-recording of allegations;

- the use of administrative classifications to avoid formal crime recording;
- performance-driven recording culture;
- and institutional resistance to disclosure of such matters.

The significance of the Patrick disclosures lies not merely in the allegations themselves, but in the fact that:

- they entered Parliamentary proceedings;
- they were considered by Parliamentary committees;
- they contributed to national concern regarding police crime statistics;
- and they resulted in formal scrutiny by HMIC.

The Patrick material demonstrates that concerns surrounding:

- evidential visibility;
- administrative filtering;
- and institutional management of crime recording

were already matters of national constitutional concern years before the later emergence of:

“guidance to not record has been a success.”

That historical continuity matters profoundly.

1. Introduction

The public ordinarily assumes that the criminal justice system functions in a relatively straightforward manner:

- allegations are reported;
- crimes are recorded;
- evidence is gathered;
- investigations occur;
- courts determine outcomes.

However, the James Patrick disclosures exposed concerns that a more complex and constitutionally troubling reality may exist beneath the surface.

The central constitutional issue is not merely whether crimes were under-recorded. It is whether institutional systems possessed the practical ability to influence:

- whether allegations became formally visible at all;
- whether investigative duties crystallised;
- and whether downstream criminal justice processes ever properly began.

That issue now sits directly alongside evidence emerging from the ongoing Operation Talla investigation.

2. James Patrick and Parliamentary Evidence

In November 2013, Metropolitan Police officer James Patrick gave evidence before the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC).

The official Parliamentary record is publicly available.

Patrick's evidence addressed serious concerns regarding:

- crime recording integrity;
- rape recording;
- “Crime Related Incidents” (CRIs);
- and institutional incentives affecting statistical presentation.

One of the most significant exchanges concerned rape recording practices within the Metropolitan Police.

Patrick stated:

“We found that there was about a 22% under-recording of rape in the Metropolitan Police Service.”

Source:

Public Administration Select Committee Oral Evidence, 21 November 2013.

He further stated:

“If you extrapolate that nationally, you are looking at around 2,000 sexual offences and 900 rapes not being recorded every year.”

Source:

Public Administration Select Committee Oral Evidence, 21 November 2013.

These were extraordinary allegations.

They did not concern isolated administrative errors.

They concerned systemic evidential visibility.

3. Crime Related Incidents (CRIs) and Administrative Filtering

A central issue raised by Patrick concerned the use of “Crime Related Incidents” (CRIs).

A CRI permits information to be logged without formally recording a notifiable crime.

Patrick alleged that this mechanism was being improperly utilised in circumstances where crimes should have been formally recorded.

He stated:

“The issue is that they were keeping crime-related incident cases until they achieve a disposal.”

Source:

Public Administration Select Committee Oral Evidence, 21 November 2013.

The constitutional significance of this observation cannot be overstated because once allegations remain administratively outside formal crime recording structures:

- statistical visibility changes;

- investigative obligations may weaken;
- disclosure pathways alter;
- and downstream criminal justice safeguards become compromised.

This is not merely a technical recording issue.

It concerns the structural integrity of the justice system itself.

4. Parliamentary Concern

The Public Administration Select Committee treated the matter seriously.

Committee Chair Bernard Jenkin MP stated:

“We are indebted to PC Patrick for his courage in speaking out.”

Source:

Public Administration Select Committee Report: *Why We Can't Count on Police Recorded Crime Statistics (2014)*.

The Committee subsequently published its report, titled:

“Why We Can't Count on Police Recorded Crime Statistics”

The report concluded:

“The data on crime recorded by the police are not sufficiently reliable to be used without qualification...”

Source:

House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, Thirteenth Report of Session 2013 - 14.

The Committee also identified:

- target culture;
- performance pressure;
- and institutional incentives

as matters contributing to distorted recording practices.

Importantly, the report did not frame the issue as accidental administrative imperfection alone - It identified structural and cultural concerns.

5. HMIC Findings

Following growing concern regarding crime recording integrity, HMIC conducted further examination.

HMIC later concluded that approximately one in five crimes were not being properly recorded by police forces in England and Wales.

This was a matter of national significance.

The issue was so serious that the UK Statistics Authority removed the “National Statistics” designation from police recorded crime data.

That step reflected a profound institutional loss of confidence in official crime recording reliability.

6. The Treatment of James Patrick

The public significance of the Patrick case was intensified by what followed after his disclosures.

Rather than being institutionally celebrated, Patrick became subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Public reporting at the time indicated that misconduct proceedings were initiated after media disclosures concerning recording practices.

Patrick later resigned from the Metropolitan Police.

Whether one agrees with every aspect of Patrick's analysis is not the central issue.

The constitutional pattern however is unmistakable:

- internal concern raised;
- evidential integrity questioned;
- institutional defensiveness follows.

That pattern has repeatedly appeared in modern policing controversies.

7. The Connection to Operation Talla

It is important to state carefully and accurately that the Patrick disclosures pre-dated Covid-19 by many years.

No evidence suggests that Operation Talla existed in 2013.

However, the Patrick material demonstrates something profoundly important:

The concepts later emerging within Operation Talla were not historically unimaginable anomalies.

The following concerns already demonstrably existed within British policing discourse:

- under-recording;
- administrative downgrading;
- visibility management;
- statistical pressures;
- evidential filtering;
- and institutional control over whether allegations formally entered crime systems.

That historical context now sits alongside later Operation Talla evidence including:

- the 12 January 2022 national police chiefs' meeting;
- Owen Weatherill's 18 January 2022 communication to Chief Constables and Force Duty Gold Officers;
- the 25 January 2022 Speirs Directive;
- and the subsequent internal communication stating *"guidance to not record has been a success."*

That sequence is constitutionally extraordinary because it suggests that concerns surrounding evidential visibility may not represent isolated historical anomalies, but potentially manifestations of a deeper institutional culture surrounding administrative control of investigative pathways.

8. CPIA 1996 and the Constitutional Problem

The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (CPIA) depends fundamentally upon:

- proper recording;
- retention;
- revelation;
- and investigation,

but if allegations:

- never properly enter recording systems;
- are administratively diverted;
- or are prevented from crystallising into formal investigations,

then downstream disclosure obligations become structurally weakened before they meaningfully begin.

That is why the phrase:

“guidance to not record has been a success”

has such constitutional significance. It appears outcome-orientated rather than truth-orientated and once institutions begin managing visibility itself, the distinction between investigating allegations and administratively controlling exposure becomes dangerously blurred.

9. Conclusion

The James Patrick disclosures matter today for fundamental reasons:

They demonstrate that concerns surrounding crime recording integrity, evidential visibility and institutional management of allegations were already matters of national, Parliamentary and oversight concern long before Covid-19 and Operation Talla emerged.

That historical continuity significantly weakens any suggestion that later “*to not record*” approaches were historically inconceivable or institutionally unprecedented.

The broader constitutional issue is now unavoidable.

A justice system cannot maintain public confidence if institutions themselves possess the practical ability to influence:

- whether allegations become formally visible;
- whether investigative duties arise;

- and whether evidential reality itself enters ordinary criminal justice pathways

because once evidential visibility becomes administratively manageable, constitutional safeguards themselves begin to at least, weaken, or even cease to exist at all and that is precisely why the Patrick disclosures remain so vitally important today.