

Norman Bettison referred to IPCC over Stephen Lawrence inquiry

Former chief constable met with allegations he commissioned report about witness due to appear before inquiry in 1998



📷 Norman Bettison resigned as chief of the West Yorkshire force over allegations about his role in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster. Photograph: Anna Gowthorpe/PA

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The controversy over police dirty tricks directed at Stephen Lawrence's family's campaign for justice grew today after Sir Norman Bettison was alleged to have attempted to intervene in the public inquiry into the racist killing.

Bettison, former chief constable of the West Yorkshire police force, has been referred to the Independent **Police** Complaints Commission (IPCC) over allegations that he commissioned a report about a witness due to appear before the Macpherson inquiry in 1998.

The referral to the IPCC was made by the current head of the West Yorkshire force and by its police and crime commissioner, Mark Burns-Williamson, who said there were "concerns about the motivation for the report".

Burns-Williamson said that a search had uncovered three documents which "raise significant concerns over the role of Sir **Norman Bettison** at the time he was assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire police in 1998 in commissioning a report to be prepared in the respect of a key witness appearing before the Macpherson inquiry.

"This may suggest an attempt to intervene in the course of a public inquiry and influence the manner in which the testimony of a witness, who was due to present evidence before it, was received."

Bettison resigned as chief of the West Yorkshire force over allegations about his role in the aftermath of the Hillsborough football disaster.

The allegations about another major police force's conduct around the time of the Macpherson inquiry follow claims last week that the Greater Manchester force may also have sought to gather intelligence on individuals or groups attending a hearing of the landmark public inquiry.

Those allegations have also been referred to the IPCC, which said it was assessing what to do with them.

Burns-Williamson said the Lawrence family deserved an independent review of their treatment by the police following revelations in the Guardian that an undercover Metropolitan police officer was asked to find dirt on them and the key witness in the case, Duwayne Brooks. "This is a matter which needs to be thoroughly investigated, and if wrongdoing is demonstrated those responsible must face the consequences of their actions"

Burns-Williamson said: "I am sure the Independent Police Complaints Commission will do the same for these separate issues of concern indicating possible corrupt practices in the later period around the Macpherson Inquiry."

West Yorkshire police said it had "discovered material that identifies that a man, due to give evidence to the inquiry in October 1998, when it sat in Bradford, was the subject of a police report in circumstances that have given rise to concerns about the motivation for the report and therefore its appropriateness."

The Macpherson inquiry's main hearings were in London, but it also held hearings in Manchester on 13 October 1998 and Bradford on 21 October 1998, with contributions from the local police, councils and race equality campaigners.

Former Met undercover officer Peter Francis recently told the Guardian that attempts were made to find information to smear the Lawrence family after the murder in April 1993. It was also revealed that meetings between the surviving victim of the attack that killed Stephen, Duwayne Brooks, his lawyers and police were bugged by the Met.

Mark Gilmore, chief constable of West Yorkshire Police, said: "The allegations made against two other police forces and the material we have found in connection with the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry raise significant issues of not just public confidence and trust, but also public interest."

Home secretary Theresa May has said there could be a police investigation into the activities of undercover officers and an investigation by Mark Ellison QC into allegations of corruption in the original investigation into the murder. A home office spokesperson said: "The Home Secretary has also written to all forces requesting that they undertake an urgent but exhaustive search of records and archives to ascertain whether any material is held that suggests intelligence or surveillance activity was ordered or carried out in respect of the Macpherson Inquiry, Stephen Lawrence's family or any others connected to the Inquiry or the family."

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