

# Review into Nicola Bulley investigation published

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Conclusions and recommendations from the final report

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We were commissioned by Lancashire's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Andrew Snowden to conduct an independent review into the investigation of reported missing person Nicola Bulley in February 2023.

The review aimed to:

- provide insight into the effectiveness of Lancashire Constabulary's response over the course of the period Nicola Bulley was missing
- make recommendations for Lancashire Constabulary and for wider learning to police forces nationally

We reviewed over 350 documents, emails and phone records, interviewed more than 70 key people from Lancashire Constabulary and gained insight from over 30 subject matter experts outside the force, including those from the media.

## Key findings

- There were unprecedented levels of mainstream and social media interest in the case.
- The police investigation and search was very well conducted by Lancashire Constabulary.
- The decision not to call the investigation a critical incident, despite it meeting the national definition, set the tone within the constabulary and led to several challenges.
- Media handling and communication of information to the public, and the management of this by the leadership team, led to a breakdown of public confidence.
- Despite being lawful, the release of personal details regarding Nicola was avoidable and unnecessary.
- The relationship between the police and mainstream media needs to be rebuilt.

PCC Andrew Snowden said:

*First and foremost I hope today's report reassures Nicola's family that Lancashire Constabulary carried out a professional and extensive investigation and despite important learnings highlighted in the report, none of these actions would have changed the outcome of this tragic case.*

*This review offers best practice in how high-profile cases can be best investigated and communicated under such spotlight and scrutiny, highlighting the importance of leadership command structures, declaration of critical incidents and resilience within police communications.*

*Whilst the investigation into Nicola's disappearance was found to be well handled and resourced, the media narrative was lost at an early stage, which had a detrimental impact on Nicola's family and friends, and also the confidence of the wider community. Opportunities for non-reportable media briefings on her medical history and vulnerabilities, or sharing her status as a high-risk missing person were not taken.*

*This was always intended as a learning review and as the public's voice in policing in Lancashire, I will hold the Chief Constable to account for producing an action plan against the recommendations in this report, to ensure we are delivering policing that is efficient and effective for the communities we serve.*

*Whilst there is learning for Lancashire, the report draws out a significant amount of best practice and recommendations for wider learning to police forces nationally, particularly around the relationship between the police and the media, which needs to be strengthened for everyone's benefit.*

*I would like to thank the College of Policing for their meticulous work in compiling this review, together with the operational and subject matter experts that contributed. I would also like to thank officers and staff within Lancashire Constabulary who worked tirelessly throughout this investigation, and despite the pressures and distractions, remained focussed on finding Nicola.*

*This report concludes what has been a long and painful process for Nicola's friends and family and I would ask that their privacy is respected whilst they to continue to grieve for their loss.*

**Andrew Snowden, Police and Crime Commissioner**

Chief Constable Andy Marsh, College of Policing CEO, said:

*Throughout our work, we have had Nicola's family and friends in our thoughts. We can only imagine the pain they will be feeling, coming to terms with their loss and pay tribute to their strength and patience. We hope the completion of this review will allow them the space to continue to grieve in peace.*

*The purpose of the review was not to attribute blame but identify areas of learning for the constabulary and wider policing. The decision to not call the investigation a critical incident, despite it meeting the national definition, set the tone within the Constabulary, and led to several challenges. The most notable of these was the way the constabulary released personal information about Nicola which was avoidable and unnecessary.*

*While we have not shied away from criticism there are also many areas of Lancashire Constabulary's response that should be commended including an exemplary investigation and a well conducted search.*

*At the heart of the investigation was Nicola. I am left in no doubt that she and her family were foremost in the minds of officers and staff throughout the search.*

*We stand ready to support the Constabulary, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and wider policing as we look to implement the important learning from this review.*

**Chief Constable Andy Marsh, College of Policing CEO**

Dr Iain Raphael, review lead, said:

*A professional, trusted, and appropriate working relationship between the police and the media is vital for public confidence.*

*The report makes clear that without this speculation can run unchecked and result in an extraordinary explosion of media and public interest in the case. Policing must also recognise the impact social media now has. Ultimately, police should seek to be the first with the truth and ensure the public has access to accurate and authoritative information*

*when it is most needed.*

*I'd like to put on record my thanks to everyone who contributed to the review and pay tribute to those from Lancashire Constabulary. The Constabulary welcomed the review team with transparency and candour. Their officers and staff have displayed, and continue to display, a real willingness to learn.*

**Dr Iain Raphael, review lead**

[Read the full report](#)

## Related resources

- [Lancashire's PCC announces independent Nicola Bulley case review](#)
- [Review terms of reference \(Lancashire PCC, 2023\)](#)

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