

Barry Coppinger: Cleveland Police should not be merged into another force

by Sandy McKenzie, Evening Gazette | [May 14 2013](#)



Police & Crime Commissioner for Cleveland Barry Coppinger

CRISIS-HIT Cleveland Police should remain independent, its commissioner has insisted.

[Barry Coppinger](#) said the force - which has been rocked by a series of high-profile scandals - should not be merged with a neighbouring force.

The comments came as Mr Coppinger said lessons have been learned from the findings of an [independent report](#) looking into the facts surrounding the arrest of Middlesbrough-based solicitor James Watson.

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The failings that led to a £500,000 payout to the lawyer have been addressed, he said.

The latest scandal to rock the force has seen the force accept that Mr Watson and his wife and two sons were wrongly imprisoned.

But he says the force - which has [sacked](#) its previous Chief and Deputy Chief Constables for unrelated misconduct matters in the past year - should not merge with neighbouring forces.

"I don't think that would be a good idea," said Mr Coppinger.

"That is a view I have consistently held. I don't think it would be in our interest to be part of a regional police force."

The police commissioner added that he felt such a move would "inevitably" lead to decisions affecting people in Cleveland being taken on Tyneside - and the loss of jobs on Teesside.

The activities of officers involved in the prosecution of one of Mr Watson's clients and subsequently his arrest on suspicion of perverting the course of justice were reviewed by Operation Pomeroy, carried out by West Yorkshire Police on behalf of the

Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

And Mr Coppinger has called for the publication of the report despite its criticisms of people within the Cleveland force - both current and ex-employees.

He said recommendations within the Operation Pomeroy report had already been implemented, and added: "There are criticisms of the force in the way the investigation has been carried out.

"It's their report and it's confidential at the moment. I have read it, lessons have been learned.

"Since the report has been completed and has been given to the Cleveland force, various failings have been identified and addressed.

"We have to be careful we don't allow the actions of a very, very small number of people to paint a picture of the force as a whole."

The officer in Mr Watson's case, Chief Inspector Anthony Riordan, denies acting with "anything other than professionalism and integrity".

He has made a formal complaint about the investigation into his actions. Chief Inspector Riordan has now retired on a full pension.

A file on the matter was passed to the Crown Prosecution Service, which took the decision that there was no criminal case to answer.

The Gazette [reported yesterday](#) how legal costs in the four-year case have already been estimated at about £1m - on top of the £550,000 payout.

The force has sacked former chief constable Sean Price and his deputy Derek Bonnard this year over unrelated matters.

It also remains the focus of the long-running [Operation Sacristy](#) corruption inquiry, which is also unrelated to the latest investigation.

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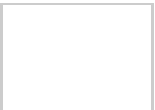


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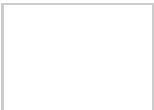


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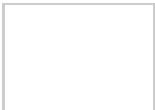
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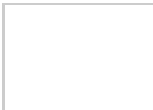
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