

Report on Solicitors Regulation Authority Communications with Full Fact

***...in Relation to Metropolitan Police Crime
Reference Number 6029679/21***

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Executive Summary

This report examines disclosed correspondence between the Solicitors Regulation Authority (“SRA”) and the organisation, Full Fact during February and March 2022, insofar as that correspondence relates to solicitors and firms connected with Metropolitan Police Service Crime Reference Number 6029679/21.

The documents demonstrate that, while a serious criminal complaint remained unresolved and subject to disputed handling by the Metropolitan Police, the SRA engaged in

contemporaneous communications with a third-party media organisation concerning:

- the existence and number of complaints against named legal firms;
- the relationship of those complaints to a specific live crime reference;
- whether disclosure of such information would breach data-protection law; and
- how that information could be framed and reported publicly.

This report does not allege bad faith. It confines itself to what is objectively evidenced and assesses the conduct against applicable public-law principles, regulatory duties and constitutional norms.

The issues raised are institutionally significant. They engage questions of regulatory independence, procedural fairness to regulated persons and the proper separation between criminal investigation, professional regulation and media reporting.

In light of recent leadership change at the SRA, this report further notes that Sarah Rapson, as the new Chief Executive, now has both the opportunity and responsibility to review and where necessary, correct historic regulatory practices which may have fallen short of these standards.

1. Factual Background

1.1 The underlying police matter

Metropolitan Police Crime Reference Number 6029679/21 was issued in December 2021 following the acceptance of a criminal complaint alleging matters of exceptional public importance.

At the relevant time:

- the crime report had not been lawfully investigated to conclusion;
- substantial evidential material was said to have been submitted by complainants; and
- the existence, scope, and even the fact of any investigation were later subject to contradictory accounts by police authorities.

These matters were live, unresolved and constitutionally sensitive throughout early 2022.

1.2 The regulatory context

The SRA is a statutory regulator exercising public functions under the Legal Services Act 2007. Its duties include:

- maintaining public confidence in the legal profession;
- acting independently, fairly, and proportionately;

- safeguarding procedural fairness for regulated persons; and
- ensuring that regulatory activity does not improperly prejudice legal proceedings or investigations.

These duties apply irrespective of media interest or public controversy.

1.3 The correspondence examined

The disclosed emails show repeated communications between Full Fact and the SRA between 14 February and 4 March 2022.

The correspondence includes:

- requests for confirmation of complaint numbers concerning named firms;
- explicit references to Broad Yorkshire Law and PJH Law;
- confirmation by the SRA that complaints existed and in what numbers;
- confirmation that the complaints discussed publicly related to CRN 6029679/21; and
- discussion of whether publication would breach data-protection obligations.

2. What the Documents Objectively Establish

2.1 Confirmation of complaint data

The SRA confirmed numerical complaint data (e.g. “14 reports”, “2 complaints”) to a third-party media organisation. This was not anonymised statistical reporting but case-specific confirmation relating to identifiable firms.

2.2 Explicit linkage to a live crime reference

The correspondence confirms that the complaints being discussed in the public domain were directly linked to Metropolitan Police CRN 6029679/21.

This situates the regulatory communications squarely within the orbit of an unresolved criminal allegation.

2.3 Contemporaneous engagement

The timing of the emails demonstrates real-time interaction. The SRA was not commenting retrospectively on concluded matters; it was communicating while:

- the policing position remained unresolved;
- complainants’ access to justice was contested; and
- the matter was actively developing.

2.4 Guidance on publishability

The SRA discussed whether publication would breach data-protection law and referred to the concept of information already being “in the public domain.” This goes beyond

passive confirmation and into the realm of enabling or shaping publication.

3. Applicable Legal and Regulatory Principles

3.1 Public-law duties of a regulator

As a public authority, the SRA is bound by fundamental public-law principles, including:

- legality;
- procedural fairness;
- rationality;
- independence; and
- proportionality.

These principles apply irrespective of whether any specific statutory prohibition is engaged.

3.2 Fairness to regulated persons

It is a foundational principle of regulatory law that:

- complaints are not findings;
- the existence of complaints does not imply wrongdoing;
and
- public confirmation of complaints can cause serious reputational harm.

Accordingly, regulators ordinarily exercise restraint, particularly where matters are unresolved and contentious.

3.3 Interaction with live criminal matters

While regulators are not precluded from acting where criminal allegations exist, there is a long-established expectation that regulatory communications will not:

- prejudice matters under investigation;
- distort public perception in a manner that undermines due process; or
- create collateral pressure on parties connected to unresolved criminal allegations.

4. Analysis

4.1 Narrative formation and institutional weight

Even absent intent, confirmation by a statutory regulator carries institutional authority. The correspondence materially assisted the formation of a public narrative about legal professionals connected to CRN 6029679/21.

This is constitutionally significant, particularly given the later disputes about whether the crime was properly investigated at all.

4.2 Asymmetry of protection

The documents do not evidence that:

- affected firms were informed of the regulator's communications with media;
- clear contextual caveats were insisted upon; or
- equivalent emphasis was placed on the absence of findings or determinations.

This asymmetry risks undermining regulatory neutrality.

4.3 Data protection is not the sole test

While data-protection compliance is addressed in the correspondence, it is not exhaustive of the SRA's obligations. Public-law fairness, reputational impact and procedural integrity are independent and cumulative duties.

Compliance with data-protection law does not, of itself, satisfy those wider obligations.

5. Leadership, Accountability and Opportunity for Correction

As noted by a disclosing party in contemporaneous communications, regulatory culture and institutional response matter as much as formal legality.

With the appointment of Sarah Rapson as Chief Executive, the SRA now has a clear opportunity to:

- review historic practices revealed by this correspondence;
- reaffirm the separation between regulation, policing and media narrative-formation; and
- demonstrate that the legal profession in England and Wales is capable of principled self-correction.

Such reflection is not an admission of wrongdoing; it is an essential component of maintaining/restoring public confidence in a constitutional regulator.

6. Matters Requiring Clarification

Based solely on the documentary record, the following questions arise legitimately:

- What internal safeguards governed SRA communications with media during live policing matters?
- What consideration was given to procedural fairness for regulated persons?
- Were less prejudicial alternatives considered?
- How does the SRA reconcile such engagement with its duty of independence?

7. Conclusion

The correspondence establishes, beyond dispute, that:

- the SRA confirmed complaint information to a media organisation;
- that information was linked to a specific, unresolved police crime reference;
- the engagement occurred in real time; and
- the communications materially informed public reporting.

Whether or not any legal boundary was crossed, the constitutional and regulatory implications are serious. Transparency, accountability and institutional self-reflection are now required in order to preserve/restore confidence in the integrity of the regulatory system.

This report is confined strictly to the documentary record disclosed and has been prepared for analytical and regulatory purposes.