# Police Scotland declines Forensic Science Regulator's offer to review SNP finance probe



Police Scotland has come under scrutiny for ignoring an official offer from the Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) to review its forensic investigation related to Operation Branchform, the inquiry into the Scottish National Party's (SNP) finances, which includes allegations against former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. The FSR, which operates under the UK Home Office, reached out to both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) in May 2023, yet over two years later, there has been no formal response from the force.

The urgency of the FSR's offer is underscored by the political and public context surrounding the investigation. While Police Scotland is not legally obliged to accept the FSR's assistance, a former SNP MP, who wished to remain anonymous, suggested that cooperating would enhance transparency and fairness during this sensitive investigation. This sentiment echoes a broader public expectation for accountability in law enforcement practices, particularly when high-profile figures are involved.

In April 2023, Police Scotland conducted a search of Sturgeon and her husband Peter Murrell's home in Glasgow, erecting a forensic tent in their garden. Murrell, who served as the chief executive of the SNP, was subsequently charged with embezzlement. Sturgeon herself was arrested two months later but ultimately cleared of any wrongdoing, a conclusion that was definitively confirmed when she was informed in January 2024 that no charges would be brought against her. This tumultuous legal backdrop has not only raised questions about financial irregularities relating to £660,000 supposedly earmarked for a second independence referendum but also brought intense media scrutiny onto Sturgeon and the SNP.

Photographs of the police activity outside the couple’s home have been described as potentially "era-defining" images in Scottish politics. They encapsulate the heightened tensions surrounding the ongoing investigation into the SNP's financial conduct, with key allegations focused on the misappropriation of funds raised for pro-independence activities since 2021. The situation has led to significant public interest and debate over the governance of the party, with many feeling a compelling need for rigorous investigation and transparency.

Despite the oversight offered by the FSR, the absence of an equivalent regulatory body in Scotland places Police Scotland in a unique position. The FSR aims to uphold scientific quality standards within forensic science across the criminal justice system, yet its recommendations in Scotland are contingent on voluntary cooperation from local authorities. This procedural gap has left some observers concerned about the integrity of the forensic practices employed during this high-stakes investigation.

Amid the turmoil, the SPA has refrained from commenting on the ongoing legal proceedings, instead directing inquiries back to Police Scotland. A spokesperson noted the active criminal investigations and the sensitivities involved, underlining the complexities of navigating police accountability in light of live cases. Meanwhile, Police Scotland has opted not to provide any statements regarding the FSR's offer or the nature of the ongoing investigations, leaving many questions unanswered in a case that continues to evolve.

The ongoing drama surrounding Sturgeon and the SNP reflects broader themes of governance, accountability, and the public’s right to transparency from law enforcement agencies. As societal expectations for integrity in public office rise, the implications of these investigations extend beyond the individual figures involved, sparking debates about the accountability mechanisms needed to restore faith in Scotland’s political institutions.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[2]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/scotlands-former-leader-sturgeon-husband-end-their-marriage-2025-01-13/), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/95fae1ce-5c9f-4bfa-92a3-d9fc103d7ee0), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/20/nicola-sturgeon-no-longer-under-investigation-over-snp-claims)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[2]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/05/peter-murrell-nicola-sturgeons-husband-arrested-over-snp-funding-investigation)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/95fae1ce-5c9f-4bfa-92a3-d9fc103d7ee0), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/20/nicola-sturgeon-no-longer-under-investigation-over-snp-claims)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[2]](https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/18/peter-murrell-rearrested-in-snp-finances-investigation-husband-nicola-sturgeon)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.inkl.com/news/police-ignore-watchdog-s-operation-branchform-forensics-review-offer> - An article from the Sunday National reveals that Police Scotland has ignored an official offer from the Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) to review its forensic investigation at Nicola Sturgeon's home. The FSR contacted both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) in May 2023 but received no response. A former SNP MP, who wished to remain anonymous, stated that while Police Scotland is not legally obligated to allow the FSR to review its forensic activities during Operation Branchform, it would be in the force's and the public's interest to do so to demonstrate transparency and fairness in the investigative process.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/scotlands-former-leader-sturgeon-husband-end-their-marriage-2025-01-13/> - Reuters reports that former Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and her husband, Peter Murrell, have decided to end their marriage. This decision comes nearly two years after both were questioned in a police investigation regarding party funds. The police probe focuses on over £600,000 raised for Scottish independence campaigners in 2017, which may have been misused for other purposes. Murrell, former CEO of the Scottish National Party (SNP), was charged with embezzlement last year. Sturgeon continues to serve as an SNP lawmaker in the devolved parliament.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/95fae1ce-5c9f-4bfa-92a3-d9fc103d7ee0> - The Financial Times reports that Nicola Sturgeon, former First Minister of Scotland, has been cleared of any wrongdoing in a police investigation into the Scottish National Party's (SNP) finances. The investigation, known as Operation Branchform, commenced in 2021 and involved the scrutiny of £667,000 in donations for pro-independence activities. Sturgeon and former party treasurer Colin Beattie were initially arrested in 2023 but were later released without charges. Meanwhile, Sturgeon's husband and former SNP chief executive, Peter Murrell, has appeared in court facing charges of embezzlement.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/20/nicola-sturgeon-no-longer-under-investigation-over-snp-claims> - The Guardian reports that Nicola Sturgeon is no longer under investigation as part of the police case looking into alleged mishandling of Scottish National Party funds. Police Scotland stated that the former Scottish First Minister would not face any charges after her former husband, Peter Murrell, appeared for a private hearing at Edinburgh sheriff court on a single charge of embezzlement. Sturgeon expressed relief at her exoneration, citing the challenging nature of the two-year investigation.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/05/peter-murrell-nicola-sturgeons-husband-arrested-over-snp-funding-investigation> - The Guardian reports that Peter Murrell, the husband of former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, was arrested by Police Scotland in April 2023 in connection with the ongoing investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National Party (SNP). Murrell was later released without charge pending further investigation. The police erected a large tent over the front door of their semi-detached home, where the curtains remained drawn, and searched their garden, with the pavement outside cordoned off by police.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/apr/18/peter-murrell-rearrested-in-snp-finances-investigation-husband-nicola-sturgeon> - The Guardian reports that Peter Murrell, the former chief executive of the SNP, was rearrested in April 2024 in connection with the ongoing investigation into the funding and finances of the Scottish National Party. Murrell had previously been arrested and interviewed as a suspect by Police Scotland detectives in April 2023 but was released later that day pending further investigation. The police erected tents at the front of their detached house, searching the garden and removing evidence from the property.