

We did not pass buck on bank forgery, says National Crime Agency

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Lynne Owens, the National Crime Agency boss, has passed claims of serious misconduct by banks to the Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Conduct Authority

The National Crime Agency has denied allegations that it “passed the buck” on claims of wholesale signature forgery by Britain’s banks as it struck back at criticism from one of Britain’s most powerful police commissioners.

Lynne Owens, director-general of the agency, insisted that it had acted to “ensure the right bodies are investigating the right allegations” after Anthony Stansfeld, police commissioner for Thames Valley, told her to “get a grip” of the emerging scandal.

Mr Stansfeld said that the agency’s decision to pass evidence of alleged signature forgery to the Serious Fraud Office and Financial Conduct Authority would ensure that the issue “will not be investigated, or, if it is, it will take years”.

The Commons’ Treasury select committee and the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking have expressed concerns that several banks have falsified signatures on court paperwork and loan agreements.

Last month, the NCA, which leads the battle against organised and economic crime, met [Julian Watts](#), who claims to have compiled a dossier of evidence that points to large-scale forgery of documents. Mr Watts asked Ms Owens to be “personally responsible and accountable” for “a comprehensive investigation”.

Ms Owens said that she had asked Graeme Biggar, director-general of the agency’s National Economic Crime Centre, to lead its response.

“The NECC was set up . . . to ensure that issues did not fall between the cracks,” Ms Owens wrote to Mr Stansfeld. Graeme has decided that the right bodies to make an initial assessment of the material that Mr Watts has now handed over are the SFO and the FCA. They will consider whether there are sufficient grounds formally to open a criminal or regulatory investigation. That does not rule out the possibility of the NCA opening an investigation in the future, but that is not where we are now.”

Mr Stansfeld, 73, said that the FCA and SFO were not the right organisations to investigate the claims. “It should be put a stop to and only the NCA can do this. To look the other way is unacceptable,” he wrote in an email exchange with Ms Owens, 50, seen by *The Times*. “The NCA needs to get a grip of this. It is not victimless. It needs sorting out as a matter of considerable urgency. It is your job to do that. It should not be shunted around between agencies over a period of many years.”

Ms Owens said she would not correspond further with Mr Stansfeld on the issue until the SFO and FCA had made an assessment of the allegations.

Mr Watts claims that forged signatures have been used for reasons including to quickly force through home repossessions by short-cutting due process. He said that he had passed evidence to Ms Owens, which he claimed showed evidence of “forgery, perverting the course of justice and proceeds of crime [and] money laundering offences”.