



## Undercover police and policing

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# Sir John Mitting to take over undercover police inquiry

Inquiry into infiltration of political groups is currently overseen by Lord Justice Pitchford, who has motor neurone disease

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A new judge has been selected to lead the public inquiry into the undercover infiltration of political groups.

Sir John Mitting has been chosen to take over the inquiry in future from Lord Justice Pitchford, who has been diagnosed with motor neurone disease.

[Mitting's appointment was announced](#) on Wednesday by the home secretary, Amber Rudd, although it is not yet known when he will take charge.

Pitchford [had been appointed two years ago](#) to head the inquiry. When he announced his diagnosis in February, he said he would be unable to complete the inquiry but intended to continue for as long as possible. The Home Office said Mitting would initially support Pitchford as a panel member “[with a view to succeeding him](#) as chairman of the inquiry.

Theresa May, when she was home secretary, [set up the inquiry in 2014](#) after a series of revelations about the activities of undercover officers who were sent to infiltrate political groups. The spies had deceived [women into forming intimate relationships](#), collected information about grieving families [such as the parents of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence](#), and [stolen the identities of dead children](#).

The inquiry has been delayed as [police have argued](#) that much of it should be held in secret to protect the identities of the undercover officers and the techniques they used. The inquiry was due to have been completed next year but is unlikely to start hearing evidence in public before the second half of 2019 ([pdf](#)).

Pitchford and Mitting will have to take a series of decisions that will determine how much of the inquiry will be heard in private. They will decide whether the identities of individual officers should be kept secret.

Those who were spied upon have argued that the inquiry should be held in public as they want to know how the undercover officers behaved.

Mitting, who became a QC in 1987, has been a high court judge in England and Wales since 2001. Between 2007 and 2012, he was chairman of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which rules on whether or not individuals should be deported from the UK. The commission has been [described as Kafkaesque](#) as it regularly hears secret evidence that [can be used to deport individuals](#) on grounds of national security without them seeing it.

Since 2015, Mitting has been the vice-president of the investigatory powers tribunal, which hears complaints about the intelligence agencies. The tribunal has been criticised for **rarely upholding the complaints** and for **operating in secrecy**.

Police have recently **attempted to narrow the scope of the inquiry**, arguing that it does not need to examine the conduct of every undercover officer in great detail - an argument rejected by Pitchford.

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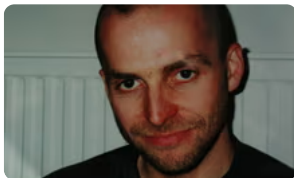
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