A mental health trust and the Metropolitan Police have been accused of trying to cover up alleged racism towards patients during an extraordinary night when 48 officers — some in riot gear — were deployed to deal with disturbances in a ward of vulnerable adults.

Campaigners have spent three years trying to uncover what happened at the River House facility at Bethlem Royal Hospital, part of the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, on 1 October 2012.

Several days of disturbances escalated into a riot, the ringleaders of which were four patients, three black and one white. They had placed staff under siege, which required police intervention before control could be regained. The Met sent in 48 officers, some armed, and dog units. More than 20 officers entered the ward, including several Tactical Support Group (TSG) officers in “strict, compact riot formation” armed with Tasers, shields, visors and batons.

An independent report into the disturbances commissioned by the trust said: “According to staff statements, the police, after entering the unit, ignored the request of staff to treat Patient C (a white patient) the same way as they had treated the three black patients. “Staff state the police made no attempt to coordinate their actions with [hospital] staff as is standard practice during a siege, to gain information and to help them plan their strategy in order to minimise disruption to the unit.”

A 111-page report was completed in May 2013 and a summary published that August. An “unreadable” version was only made public in May 2014 following Freedom of Information requests made by David Mery on behalf of the charity Black Mental Health UK. Almost all the allegations of racism and the patients’ ethnicity had been censored.

A trust spokeswoman said the report had been redacted on legal advice “for reasons of patient and public safety, and patient confidentiality… to maintain security arrangements used in a forensic mental health facility and to protect patient and public safety”. The report, published on the trust website, provides the public with a clear and independent account of what happened on 1 October 2012.

“Following the investigation in 2013, the trust has taken action to address all recommendations made in the report to prevent a similar incident recurring.” A Met spokeswoman said: “The location is known to officers as housing high-risk mental health patients. There was a serious threat to staff safety, and some patients, whose medical history was not known to officers, were unsupervised.”

The Met Police had been criticised for their actions at the same hospital in 2010 when student Olaseni Lewis, 23, died after being forcibly restrained by up to 11 officers while seeking help as a voluntary patient.