



Public Office (Accountability) Bill: House of Commons' Report Stage Briefing

January 2026

- Public Law Project (PLP) welcomes the Public Office (Accountability) Bill. It is a landmark piece of legislation facilitating enhanced ethical standards within public bodies, greater transparency and integrity among public officials, stronger protection of victims of state injustice, and deeper public trust that wrongs committed by public officials will be admitted and righted sooner rather than later.
- However, there is the opportunity to strengthen the Bill so that it better achieves the Government's aim to "help address any imbalance of power and promote transparency and fairness."¹ This is by applying the duty of candour in clause 2 to public officials subject to ombudsmen, commissioner, and inspectorate complaints, reviews, or investigations expressly on the face of the Bill. These bodies carry out functions of significant public interest – which can be just as nationally important as public inquiries.
- Therefore, PLP urges the Government to amend the Bill to ensure that the duty of candour in clause 2 applies to public officials subject to ombudsmen, commissioner, or inspectorate investigations, reviews, or complaints.

Acknowledging the significant public importance of this Bill, the Government has committed to "*listen...and provide a voice for victims.*" The Minister personally committed to "*doing everything in [his] power to make sure that when this Bill leaves Parliament, it does so as the strongest possible Bill.*"²

Whilst PLP welcomes the intention of the Bill, we recommend it is strengthened by extending the duty of candour to public officials subject to ombudsmen, commissioner, and inspectorate complaints, reviews, or investigations. This will facilitate transparency over more matters of public importance, enable systemic problems to be identified earlier, and strengthen redress mechanisms which are easier for victims to access.

¹ Public Office (Accountability) Bill Explanatory [Notes](#)

² Public Office (Accountability) Bill, House of Commons Hansard, Monday 3 November 2025, Column 722.



During second reading, the Minister stated the Government's future intention to use the power in Part 6 of Schedule 1 of the Bill to extend the duty of candour to some ombudsmen investigations, namely the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Prison and Probation Ombudsman, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the Housing Ombudsman.

However, no timetable was set for this extension. There was also no reference to investigations, complaints, or reviews dealt with by Inspectorates or Commissioners.

PLP recommends these bodies should be included from the outset on the face of the Bill for three reasons.

- 1. National significance:** Each of these bodies can deal with issues of national importance and significant public interest and concern. For example, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman was one of the first accountability bodies to register findings and recommend changes and remedies in relation to the Windrush Compensation Scheme.³ It has also carried out a review into how the NHS in England deals with sepsis, and suggested recommendations which transformed the NHS's approach to the condition and which save hundreds, if not thousands, of lives.⁴
- 2. Prevention and early justice:** Including these bodies on the face of the Bill now will facilitate early justice by encouraging systemic problems to be caught early by ombudsmen, commissioners, and inspectors. Broadly, public inquiries are about learning lessons from past events and may take some time to gather evidence and issue recommendations. Complaints to ombudsmen, by contrast, tend to occur sooner, enabling better information through the duty of candour to be obtained at the earliest opportunity.
- 3. Victim-centred:** It is normally Ministers who order public inquiries and investigations. This places power in the hands of central government. By contrast, ombudsmen and some inspectorates can investigate complaints from individuals or so-called "super-complaints" from organisations representing victims.⁵ Extending the duty of candour now, then, will strengthen routes of redress which are comparatively accessible to victims.

Questions to ask the Minister:

³ Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, '[Home Office is wrongly denying compensation to Windrush victims](#)' (5 September 2024).

⁴ Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, '[Time to Act – Severe sepsis: rapid diagnosis and treatment of saves lives](#)' (September 2013).

⁵ Super-Complaints (Designation and Procedure) Regulations 2018.



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- Given that the Government has recognised the national importance of their function, what is the Government's justification for not including ombudsmen, commissioners, and inspectorates on the face of the Bill?
- Will the Government bring forward amendments at a later stage which applies the duty of candour to public bodies subject to ombudsmen, commissioner, and inspectorate investigations, reviews, and complaints?