

## The Committee on Standards in Public Life

### Accountability within public bodies - acting on early warning signs

#### Terms of Reference

The [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) is carrying out a review into accountability in public life.

#### **The Seven Principles of Public Life**

##### *Accountability*

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

In recent years we have seen several examples of major failures within public institutions, where it seems that opportunities were missed to address issues before they escalated. We are asking, when things go wrong in public bodies, why does it take so long for problems to be recognised and the leadership to respond appropriately and, most importantly, what needs to change?

Our review will identify where public bodies should focus their attention to maximise the likelihood of problems being uncovered and addressed before issues escalate and lives are damaged. We have chosen to look especially at accountability *within* public bodies because we want to help organisations to get better at holding themselves to account for the effective delivery of public services.

Our review will consider:

1. How the Nolan Principles can guide decision-making within public bodies.
2. How public bodies can support Parliament, regulators and other bodies to hold them to account on behalf of the public, including but not limited to making available the information necessary for them to do so effectively.
3. Best practice in managing risk within public sector organisations. We will look at how organisations can use data to analyse patterns, identify early warning signs and escalate issues of concern in a timely manner.
4. The role of boards of public bodies, including how they can maximise their effectiveness at providing timely challenge to the organisation.
5. How a healthy organisational culture can help public bodies to learn from their mistakes and take action swiftly to put things right.