

Accountability within public bodies - acting on early warning signs

Open consultation

The [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) is carrying out a review into accountability in public life. The terms of reference for the review are available on our website.

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.

As part of this review, the Committee is holding an open consultation. **The consultation will run from 09:00 on Monday 25 March 2024 to 17:00 on Friday 14 June 2024.**

Replies to this consultation should be emailed to public@public-standards.gov.uk Further details on how to respond are set out below.

Consultation questions

The Committee invites responses to the following consultation questions. Submissions need not respond to every question.

1. What are the main reasons why public bodies might fail to act quickly and decisively at the first sign of a problem within the organisation?
2. Can you describe any examples of practical measures used by public bodies to ensure that employees are guided by the Nolan Principles at critical decision points, including but not limited to decision-making models, codes of conduct, guidance and training?

3. Public bodies are required to manage a variety of risks to the successful delivery of public services. What role can data play in understanding these risks?
4. Are you aware of any examples of organisations that have good processes in place for identifying patterns and spotting problems that need addressing?
5. What practices and behaviours can the boards of public bodies adopt to ensure that they have proper oversight of their organisation?
6. How should public sector bodies conduct their annual board effectiveness evaluations? What does best practice look like?
7. Accountability in public life can sometimes be associated with blame. How can public bodies build a culture where people feel safe to speak up about concerns, allowing problems to be addressed early and lessons to be learned?
8. The Nolan Principles of honesty and openness require public bodies to be transparent about how they operate and the decisions they make on behalf of the public. Are you aware of any examples of organisations exhibiting good practice in this area?

How to make a submission

Anyone with an interest may make a submission. The Committee particularly welcomes submissions from public bodies.

Submissions should be emailed to public@public-standards.gov.uk.

Submissions must:

- State clearly who the submission is from, i.e. whether from your or sent on behalf of an organisation.
- Include a brief introduction about you/ your organisation and your reason for submitting evidence.
- Be in word or another editable format. Please do not send uneditable formats like PDF.
- Have numbered paragraphs.
- Comprise a single document. If there are any annexes or appendices, these should be included in the same document.
- Be concise – we recommend no more than 2,000 words in length.
- Contain a contact email address.

The Committee may choose not to accept a submission as evidence, or not to publish a submission even if it is accepted as evidence. This may occur where a submission is very long or contains material which is inappropriate.

Submissions will be published online with any contact information removed.

The Committee will publish anonymised submissions (where the name of the respondent and any references to named individuals are removed) where a respondent makes a reasonable request to do so.

Submissions sent to the Committee after the deadline of 17:00 on 14 June 2024 may not be considered.

If you have any questions, please contact the Committee's Secretariat by email (public@public-standards.gov.uk). If you have any questions you would prefer to discuss by telephone, please include your contact number in the email.