

Honesty

Objectivity

Openness

Selflessness

Integrity

Accountability

Leadership

PRESS NOTICE

3 March 2026

CAN OMBUDSMEN HELP DETECT SYSTEM FAILURE? - NEW REVIEW BY THE INDEPENDENT ETHICS AND INTEGRITY COMMISSION

The newly established [Independent Ethics and Integrity Commission \(EIC\)](#) has today launched its first Review, exploring the role of public service ombudsman schemes in identifying wider systemic failures.

Recent years have seen a wave of lengthy and expensive inquiries revealing major public sector failures. The EIC will investigate whether the current ombudsman framework allows for the early detection of underlying problems, and whether an enhanced role for these schemes could help bring about more timely improvements to public services.

This review builds on the 2025 report, [Recognising and Responding to Early Warning Signs](#), which identified a desperate need to spot "red flags" before they escalate into national tragedies.

EIC Chair Doug Chalmers, said:

“We want to look at whether the powers public sector ombudsmen have, and the way they currently operate, enables them to pick up themes and highlight developing problems in our institutions.

“Scandals like Grenfell Tower, Infected Blood, and the tragic death of Awaab Ishak all proved that the cost of systemic failures is unacceptable. The EIC will explore whether the unique vantage point of ombudsman schemes - informed by the volume and nature of public complaints - offers a significant opportunity to recognise early warning signs. We want to

see whether their perspective can be better utilised, to address issues before they escalate, with the ultimate goal of preventing future tragedies.’

The Review will:

- inquire into the public’s expectations of the role of the modern public sector ombudsman;
- consider how ombudsman schemes should balance handling complaints made by individuals with identifying and investigating systemic failings and supporting public bodies with institutional learning;
- identify the powers required by ombudsman schemes in order to be able to investigate systemic failings; and any barriers to initiating systemic investigations;
- identify the appropriate oversight mechanisms required for any proposed changes;
- examine whether advisory Complaint Standards are sufficient for encouraging high standards of complaints handling in the public sector or whether ombudsman Complaint Standards should be statutory;
- consider whether the recommendations of ombudsman schemes should be binding; and
- explore ways to make it easier for the public to navigate the public sector ombudsman landscape.

The Commission has issued a call for evidence, inviting stakeholders, experts, and the public to contribute their views.

The closing date for submissions is 30 April 2026. The Commission intends to publish the Review findings in the New Year.

Notes to Editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. [Find out more about the Ethics and Integrity Commission](#)
3. The EIC was established in October 2025, building on the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Commission [promotes the highest standards in public life, reports to the Prime Minister on matters concerning ethical standards, and advises public authorities on the development of clear codes of conduct with effective oversight arrangements.](#) The Commission is not a regulator and has no remit to investigate individual cases.
4. The current members of the EIC are Doug Chalmers CB DSO OBE (Chair), The Rt Hon Lady Mary Arden of Heswall DBE, The Rt Hon Ian Blackford (Scottish National Party), Cllr Ruth Dombey OBE (Liberal Democrat) Ewen Fergusson, Professor Gillian Peele and Rt Hon Michael Tomlinson KC (Conservative). There is a public appointments process underway for the recruitment of 3 additional independent members to the EIC.
5. Follow the EIC on [Linkedin](#), [X](#) and [Bluesky](#)