Call for Evidence: Public Office Accountability Bill[1]

Community Planning Alliance Submission

Extending the Duty of Candour and Assistance

We would like to see an explicit extension of the duty of candour and assistance to the processes involved within the end-to-end planning system. This would include when:

- Ministers are setting policy, with evidence being required to underpin all statements made (it is unacceptable that Ministers repeat the rhetoric of the housing lobby, for example, rather than using verified data from the publicly funded Office for National Statistics), as an example, the recent report[2] from the Environmental Audit Committee (Environmental sustainability and housing growth) states (recommendation 22, page 19) that "*that it is imperative that they* [the government] *publish their considerations as to how the NPPF and PIB comply with the Government's own Environmental Principles Policy Statement*"
- Officers are drafting and publishing local development plans, spatial development plans and other documentation relating to planning
- Officers are writing reports recommending approval or rejection of planning applications
- Officers or elected members are providing written and/or face to face evidence at planning examinations, hearings, inquiries, etc.

This is essential to restore trust in the planning process.

Fulfilling the Green Claims Code

The principles set out in the government's Green Claims Code[3] should fully apply to all those undertaking public service. These principles relate to any environmental claims being made and aim to prevent citizens from being misled by inappropriate written or spoken assertions. They also ensure that citizens are sufficiently informed, clearly defining the effects of a proposed scheme, and enabling competent input and feedback to be made.

The principles are:

- Environmental claims must be truthful and accurate
- Environmental claims must be clear and unambiguous
- Environmental claims must not omit or hide important relevant information
- Any comparisons used must be fair and meaningful
- Environmental claims must consider the full life cycle of the product or service
- Environmental claims must be substantiated.

This is essential to eliminate claims of 'greenwashing' when government or other public servants are making or supporting proposals that will damage our environment. If such proposals are necessary, public bodies should be fully transparent about the implications.

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[1] https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2025/nov-2025/public-office-accountability-bill-call-for-evidence/
[2] https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/50235/documents/271280/default/
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims/environmental-claims-on-goods-and-services

The recent report[4] of the Environmental Audit Committee, for example, "*challenges the lazy narrative that nature is a blocker to housing delivery*". The government should implement all of the recommendations in their report and ensure future statements are compliant with the Green Claims Code.

Ensuring compliance with the Civil Society Covenant

The government has introduced a Civil Society Covenant[5] which the Bill should endorse and should confirm the requirement for compliance.

The Covenant aims to ensure civil society is respected, supported and listened to by the public sector and is underpinned by specific values and behaviours. Rather than relying on lobbying from those with a vested interest in influencing government policy, community expertise should be explicitly sought to set the agenda and develop policy. This will help the public sector to best serve the people and communities they are accountable to.

The Covenant's principles state that, among other things, the public sector will:

- Promote participation and inclusion by involving people in decisions that affect their lives, ensuring their voices are heard and removing barriers to democratic participation.
- Strengthen trust with open communication and sharing of information, data, and best practice, and by civil society organisations being proactively transparent and accountable for the money they receive.

It is essential that these principles are honoured, including in other Parliamentary Bills (such as the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which aims to reduce democratic participation).

Kind regards

Marj Powner

Vice Chair

Community Planning Alliance

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About the Community Planning Alliance

The Community Planning Alliance is a national umbrella group for over 700 communities, all are campaigning against inappropriate development in their areas, and all disagree that decisions are being made in the 'public interest'. We have extensive knowledge and experience of the planning system, and our aims include seeking increased community participation, better environmental protections and the right homes and infrastructure in the right places.

[4] https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/50235/documents/271280/default/
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-covenant/civil-society-covenant