

Briefing Paper: Public Office (Accountability) Bill

Newcastle Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)

Date: 30th June 2026

Audience: Statutory and relevant safeguarding partners across education, local authority services, health, police, voluntary and community sector

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing provides safeguarding partners with a concise overview of the proposed Public Office (Accountability) Bill and its implications for organisational governance, leadership accountability and safeguarding practice. It highlights key expectations and the practical steps partners should consider to ensure readiness.

Context and Rationale

The Bill introduces a strengthened statutory framework placing clear duties on public authorities and those exercising public functions to act with candour, transparency and integrity.

It responds to persistent concerns from public inquiries and investigations where failures to disclose information, lack of openness and weak accountability have undermined trust and hindered effective scrutiny. The legislation seeks to address this by establishing enforceable standards of ethical conduct, introducing new criminal offences, and strengthening expectations for organisational leadership and culture.

The Bill also reflects a wider national shift towards greater transparency, stronger accountability mechanisms and clearer expectations for how organisations engage with investigations, inquests and public scrutiny processes.

What This Means in Practice

The Bill represents a significant change in how organisations and professionals are expected to behave, particularly in relation to safeguarding, inquiries and investigations. In practice, partners will be expected to demonstrate:

- **A proactive duty of candour**

Organisations must act openly and transparently at all times, including:

- Disclosing relevant information without being asked
- Correcting errors or omissions promptly
- Actively supporting inquiries and investigations

- **Stronger expectations during investigations and inquests**

This Includes:

- Notifying investigators of relevant involvement
- Providing full and timely access to information and records
- Offering clear and accurate position statements where required

- **Clear governance and ethical standards**

Organisations must:

- Embed formal codes of conduct reflecting recognised ethical principles
- Ensure staff are aware of expectations and consequences of non-compliance
- Publish and maintain standards of professional behaviour

- **Increased legal and leadership accountability**

Failure to comply—particularly where actions are reckless or intended to mislead—may constitute a criminal offence.

- **Broader applicability across the system**

The duties extend beyond traditional public bodies to include organisations delivering public functions, including commissioned and contracted services.

Key Messages for Partners

Partners should be aware of several core messages arising from the Bill:

- Transparency is no longer discretionary—it is a **legal obligation**.
- Professional responsibility includes **actively sharing information**, not simply responding to requests.
- Leadership teams are accountable for **embedding a culture of openness and ethical conduct**.
- Governance arrangements must ensure **clear oversight, robust record-keeping and audit readiness**.
- Misleading the public, whether deliberate or reckless, is likely to carry **significant legal consequences**.
- The expectations apply across the partnership, **including providers delivering public services on behalf of statutory agencies**.

Engagement and Next Steps

The Bill will place greater pressure on governance, record-keeping and assurance arrangements, requiring partners to demonstrate that practice aligns with statutory expectations. Safeguarding partners are encouraged to begin preparing for the implications of the Bill now.

Key actions include:

- **Review governance and policies:** Assess whether existing frameworks adequately reflect duties of candour, transparency and ethical conduct.
- **Strengthen organisational culture:** Ensure leaders actively promote openness, challenge poor practice and support staff to raise concerns.
- **Enhance training and awareness:** Provide clear guidance to staff on expectations, particularly in relation to investigations, disclosures and record-keeping..
- **Review information-sharing and record-keeping processes:** Ensure systems support timely, accurate and complete disclosure of information.
- **Test organisational readiness:** Consider how effectively the organisation could respond to an inquiry, inquest or investigation today.
- **Engage with partnership discussions:** Work across agencies to ensure a consistent, system-wide understanding of expectations and roles.

The Partnership will continue to monitor national developments and provide further guidance as the Bill progresses.