

# Independent Public Advocate

Annual Report

September to December 2025

HC 375





# 2025 Annual Report

## Independent Public Advocate for England and Wales

---

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 41 of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 25 June 2026

HC 375



© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/official-documents](https://www.gov.uk/official-documents).

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[info@independentpublicadvocate.org.uk](mailto:info@independentpublicadvocate.org.uk)

ISBN 978-1-5286-6572-8

E03607983 06/26

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

## A note on terminology

---

We recognise that people have different preferences for how they are described after a major incident. In this annual report, we use "victims", the term set out in legislation, and "bereaved families" to reflect the wider group affected, while fully respecting individuals who prefer other terms such as "survivor".

# Table of Contents

01 Foreword	5
02 Introduction	8
03 Who are we	9
04 Establishing the Office	12
05 Deployment: Heaton Park Synagogue Attack	15
06 Visibility, Access and Trust	21
07 Governance and Accountability	25
08 The Next Phase	27

# 01 Foreword

---

Serving as the first Independent Public Advocate (IPA) for England and Wales, in the first role of its kind anywhere in the world, carries a profound responsibility. The role exists because in the aftermath of major incidents, victims, survivors and bereaved families refused to accept silence, defensiveness and delay - insisting on truth, accountability and justice. It is this legacy that defines what this role must now deliver: ensuring that the pursuit of justice is not left to those already carrying profound loss.



For decades, those affected by major incidents have been left to navigate complex and often adversarial systems alone, at moments of profound grief and trauma. Too often, families have been forced to act as investigator, campaigner, archivist and advocate – not by choice, but because the system failed them.

The IPA was established in response to these failures. It recognises that victims, survivors and bereaved families face profound imbalances of power, expertise and authority in their dealings with the state. The absence of a figure to act solely in their interests has too often compounded harm and delayed justice. The IPA exists to correct that imbalance.

This first reporting period has been both formative and intense. Four working days after taking up post, I was deployed following the horrific antisemitic terrorist attack at Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester. The Office itself was still being established, without fully developed systems or infrastructure, yet the responsibility to act was immediate and very real. There was little separation between establishing the role and inhabiting it; the demands of the moment required both.

In Manchester, I saw first hand what independent advocacy must mean in practice: early presence, careful listening, cultural understanding and clarity at a time of shock and uncertainty. I witnessed public services, communities and local organisations coming together with commitment and compassion. But I also saw how quickly confusion and complexity can take hold for those directly affected as they deal with grief, fear and trauma alongside the immediate demands of investigations, inquests and everything that follows.

These experiences have directly shaped how the Office approaches its work. They also reinforced a fundamental requirement: independent advocacy cannot be improvised in the midst of crisis. It must be properly resourced so that it can operationalise at pace and be ready to stand alongside victims, survivors and bereaved families from the earliest moments after major harm. These initial months have also involved building the Office itself: its systems, its relationships and the judgement needed to operate with care, independence and credibility.

Many affected by non-recent major incidents have contacted my office during this period. While I can only be formally deployed to major incidents occurring from September 2024 onwards, an important part of my work is to listen to and understand the experiences of victims and bereaved families more broadly. I have sought to ensure that people are met with honesty, care and an independent voice - listening, signposting support where possible, and ensuring their experiences are heard, recognised and inform wider learning.

These early months have confirmed a central truth: trust is fragile. It is shaped by how institutions behave in moments of crisis. Every experience of silence, defensiveness or institutional self-protection leaves a lasting trace, shaping how future victims, communities and wider society view the institutions meant to protect and support them.

Building trust in my role and in the Office itself has been central. It cannot be created through assurances alone; it must be earned through honesty, consistency, and a willingness to confront difficult truths. Independence is central to that task and only matters if it is exercised in practice, including where this requires confronting government itself if victims are at risk of being failed.

This reporting period has coincided with Parliamentary consideration of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill, commonly known as Hillsborough Law, on which I have engaged directly with Parliament. The development of a statutory duty of candour sits alongside the work of the Independent Public Advocate as part of a broader shift towards openness and accountability. One seeks to embed candour within institutions; the other is intended to ensure that candour is experienced by those affected.

For families who have fought for decades, progress on Hillsborough Law represents more than legislative change - it is recognition of their strength and perseverance against all odds. When the system moves forward for one group, it carries meaning for others still seeking

truth and justice. It reinforces the belief that change is possible, even after many years.

I am deeply grateful to victims, survivors and bereaved families who have engaged with me, often in difficult and deeply personal circumstances, to help shape what this role must become. I also want to acknowledge the commitment of my staff, communities and organisations who have worked positively with us during this early phase.

There remains much to do. The effectiveness of independent advocacy is determined long before it is tested - by preparedness, by culture and by whether accountability is embedded before systems come under pressure.

I close this report by setting out my priorities for the year ahead. One thing is already clear: independent advocacy must become an established part of how this country responds to major harm, ensuring that the pursuit of truth, accountability and fair treatment rests with the system, not with those who have already suffered the most.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Butts', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Cindy Butts**

Independent Public Advocate for England and Wales

## 02 Introduction

The Independent Public Advocate (IPA) is a new statutory role established under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 to support victims, survivors and bereaved families following major incidents.

Major incidents often involve complex systems, multiple public authorities and overlapping processes. For those directly affected, navigating these systems becomes overwhelming at a time of profound grief, trauma and uncertainty. The IPA was created to address these challenges.

This first Annual Report covers the period from the appointment of the first Independent Public Advocate, Cindy Butts, in September 2025 to December 2025.<sup>1</sup> It encompasses both the establishment of the office and its immediate operational deployment following the antisemitic terrorist attack at Heaton Park Synagogue in October 2025.

“ The Independent Public Advocate, who has no other remit than to represent those who have suffered and been bereaved. Once that person has that locus, it becomes very difficult for Ministers and officials to resist it. ”

**Elkan Abrahamson, Hillsborough Law Now giving evidence at the Joint Committee on Human Rights**

<sup>1</sup> Under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, the IPA is required to report to the Secretary of State in respect of each calendar year by 1 July of the following year; that report must then be published and laid before Parliament.

## 03 Who we are

---



Cindy Butts is the first Independent Public Advocate (IPA) for England and Wales, appointed for a five-year term beginning in September 2025. The IPA is the statutory office-holder, exercising the powers and responsibilities conferred by Parliament under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.

She is supported by the Office of the Independent Public Advocate, which currently comprises three full-time staff: a Chief of Staff, a Communications and Engagement Manager and a Secretariat Support Officer. The Office is sponsored by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) but operates completely independently of it.

### The role of the Independent Public Advocate

The IPA's role is to support victims, survivors and bereaved families affected by major incidents occurring in England and Wales.

Under the Act, a major incident is one that causes the death of, or serious harm to, a significant number of people and is formally designated as such by the Secretary of State for Justice. Once an incident is declared, the Independent Public Advocate may be deployed to support those affected through the aftermath and the formal processes that follow.

The role of the IPA is distinct. It does not act on behalf of institutions. It operates at the point where individuals and families encounter the state following a major incident - often in circumstances of acute distress, uncertainty and imbalance of power. The IPA is trauma-informed and stands alongside those affected, amplifying their voices and supporting them to understand, navigate and engage effectively with the processes they face. In doing so, it helps to ensure that public authorities respond appropriately and are held to account.

# Core Functions

The Independent Public Advocate's core functions are set out in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 and statutory [guidance](#). These include:

## Advocacy

Ensuring victims and bereaved families are connected to appropriate services and organisations, and that their needs are recognised and acted upon by relevant agencies. Where support is absent or inadequate, escalating concerns and pressing for timely and effective responses.



## Participation

Supporting victims and bereaved families to understand and engage with investigations, inquests, public inquiries and other post-incident processes in ways that reflect individual needs and support meaningful participation.



## Challenge

Raising concerns, escalating issues and pressing for timely, appropriate and effective responses where public authorities and systems are slow, fragmented or defensive, ensuring that those affected are not marginalised or overlooked.



## Improvement

Providing independent advice to the Secretary of State for Justice on the interests of victims and bereaved families and their treatment by public authorities. Using statutory reporting powers to highlight issues and areas for improvement - helping to create the conditions in which truth can be established, accountability secured and justice pursued.



## What the role does not do

The IPA does not provide legal advice, financial support or counselling, nor does it replicate existing victim support services. Responsibility for investigation, fact-finding and the determination of accountability rests with the appropriate investigative, judicial and oversight bodies. Under the statutory framework, the IPA cannot provide direct support to individuals under the age of 18. Where children and young people are affected, the IPA will work with relevant agencies to support appropriate safeguarding and advocacy arrangements.

# Our Values

## Justice

- We press for openness where information is withheld, fragmented or obscured.
  - We ensure those affected can access the information they need to understand and participate.
  - We challenge decisions that risk limiting accountability or obscuring the truth.
- 

## Independence

- We act independently of Government, public bodies and organisations whose actions may be subject to scrutiny.
  - We form our own judgement by listening closely to the lived experience of victims and bereaved families.
  - We demonstrate independence in both what we do and how we do it.
- 

## Compassion

- We recognise the lasting impact of trauma, loss and uncertainty, without defining people by those experiences.
  - We act with empathy, respect and adapt our approach to reflect differing needs, cultures and circumstances.
  - We act with compassion in how we listen, how we speak and the pace at which we work
- 

## Dignity

- We treat every individual as a person first, not a case or a process.
  - We listen carefully, take concerns seriously, and act on what we hear.
  - We ensure people are not excluded because they lack power, knowledge or confidence.
- 

## Courage

- We exercise our powers with care when working with those we serve, and firmly when confronting systems that resist scrutiny.
  - We will name failure where it occurs and act early, even when doing so is uncomfortable.
  - We will be open when we fall short and take steps to put this right.
- 



# 04 Establishing the Office

## Building an Office Under Immediate Operational Demand

Four working days after the Independent Public Advocate (IPA) took up post, and before core systems or infrastructure had been put in place, the Office was deployed to support victims of the Heaton Park Synagogue Terror Attack. Establishment did not precede operations; it took place alongside them.

The Office was built in use; this required quick judgements about priorities and where to direct limited capacity. Preparatory work undertaken before the IPA took up post, together with valuable practical support from MoJ officials during deployment, enabled the Office to begin operating while systems and infrastructure were still being established.

Early deployment set the foundations for how the IPA operates: visible from the outset, grounded in trauma informed principles, clear in purpose and focused on dignity, fairness and the experiences of those most affected. It also brought into sharp focus the need for a properly resourced office, able to operate at short notice and scale rapidly to meet the demands of major incidents.

### September

Preliminary office systems established and IPA appointed.

### October

Secretary of State confirms deployment of IPA to Heaton Park Synagogue Attack. Immediate deployment activity begins alongside office establishment work.

### October - November

Establishment of interim casework function to enable early engagement with victims and families, alongside the launch of a website contact and referral page. Direct engagement with the affected community begins, including attending the vigil and holding early meetings with local stakeholders. IPA attends opening of the inquest. Senior ministerial engagement including meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister and Victims Minister.

### October - December

Intensive engagement with stakeholders across victims' organisations, community representatives and statutory partners informs the development of interim governance, operating and decision-making frameworks.

## Developing Office Infrastructure

The Office was established as a new public body, independent of the MoJ, ministers and operationally distinct from existing victim support arrangements. Initial resourcing assumptions provided for a small core team of three staff.

The IPA immediately recognised that the Office was under-resourced and began discussions to secure additional capacity and a sustainable operating model. This informed the initiation of a business case for additional resources to support both immediate delivery and longer-term sustainability; the case remains in development.

The immediate priority was to ensure that the Office could operate safely, lawfully and with clear independence, in the absence of fully developed systems. Interim governance and assurance arrangements were introduced at pace to support delivery. Effort focused on the functions most critical to supporting victims, survivors and bereaved families.

An interim casework function and public referral route were established quickly, forming a direct and accessible way for victims and families to engage with the Office.

Work also began to lay the foundations for longer term infrastructure, including the development of a deployment framework and initial activity to define the Office's mission, values and strategic objectives.

## Trauma-Informed Practice, Values and Culture

The IPA was clear that the effectiveness and credibility of the Office would depend on three things: being trauma-informed, values-driven in our behaviour and decision-making, and grounded in a culture centred on dignity, inclusion and listening to victims, survivors and bereaved families.

**Trauma-informed** - established as a core organising principle defining how the Office works day to day. It shapes pace, tone, judgement and behaviour, and informed communication, engagement and decision-making. All staff received specialist training delivered by Dr Bryony Farrant, Chief Psychologist to the UK COVID-19 Inquiry. In addition, we developed a trauma-informed communications guide, establishing clear and practical standards for how the Office communicates, providing a shared baseline for consistent practice.

**Values driven** - the IPA led the development of a clear set of shared values – justice, dignity, independence, courage and compassion – not as aspirational statements, but as practical guides for behaviour and decision-making. These values are designed to support consistent judgement in complex and pressured situations.

**Culture** - culture building focused on creating an organisation that listens, learns and adapts, informed by the experiences of victims, survivors and bereaved families. A deliberate commitment was made not to replicate approaches that those affected by major incidents have previously described as alienating or dismissive.

These principles informed how the Office operated under pressure and will continue to shape its development over time.

## Independence in Practice

From the outset, the IPA placed particular emphasis on establishing and protecting independence, both in how the Office interacts with government and in how it engages externally. Independence is not assumed by statute alone; it is demonstrated through the decisions the Office takes and the way it operates.

This is reflected in the Office's approach to early operational decisions, including how it engages with public authorities, works alongside local response structures, and ensures that the perspectives of victims and bereaved families shape its approach.

One early area of focus was access to legal advice. While initial arrangements provided for support through the Government Legal Department, it was recognised that in certain circumstances – particularly following major incidents or where state bodies may be implicated – legal advice would need to be obtained independently of government. Maintaining public trust, particularly the trust of victims and bereaved families, is fundamental to the IPA's credibility and effectiveness and to the delivery of Parliament's intent. In such contexts, both actual and perceived independence are critical. Where legal advice appears to originate from within Government, there is a foreseeable risk that confidence in the IPA's independence and the legitimacy of its actions may be undermined.

Work began during the reporting period to explore how such arrangements could be secured in a manner consistent with good governance and value for money.

# 05 Deployment: The Heaton Park Synagogue Attack

On 2 October 2025, a terrorist attack at Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester resulted in the death of Adrian Daulby and Melvin Cravitz, and serious physical injury to three other individuals on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. The attack was an act of antisemitic violence carried out in a sacred space, during a time of prayer and reflection. Its impact extended far beyond those physically injured.

For those present, the attack shattered a space intended to offer safety, sanctuary and spiritual refuge. For families, friends and carers, it brought sudden loss, terror and irreversible change. For the wider Jewish community in Manchester and across the country, it intensified fear and vulnerability at a time of already heightened antisemitism.

The Deputy Prime Minister announced the deployment of the Independent Public Advocate (IPA) the following day. This was the first time the role had been activated following a major incident.

At the point of deployment, the IPA was four working days into post. The Office was not yet fully established. There were no permanent systems, no casework function and no operational precedent to follow. However, our purpose was clear: to ensure those affected were not left to navigate complex investigative, legal and support processes alone, and that their interests were actively represented throughout.

## Early principles: presence, restraint and clarity

The immediate aftermath of major incidents is often marked by trauma, confusion and information overload. People's ability to absorb information or make decisions may be severely limited, while multiple agencies move quickly to respond. Poor coordination, unclear communication or premature demands for engagement can compound harm at a moment of acute vulnerability.

The IPA therefore approached deployment on the basis of three core principles:

**Presence** - To provide visible and early reassurance that an independent advocate was in place, there to support and act in the interests of victims, survivors and the bereaved.

**Restraint** - Recognising that trauma can limit people’s capacity to engage, and that contact must avoid adding burden, pressure or overwhelm at a moment of acute shock.

**Clarity** - So that people could understand the IPA’s role, what she could and could not do, and how to engage when they felt ready.

On the day of deployment, the IPA was present in Manchester, attending the vigil and introducing the role to victims, survivors and community representatives. This presence was intended to signal availability, independence and solidarity – not to require immediate engagement or testimony.

In addition, practical steps were taken to ensure information about the IPA was accessible without overloading those affected at a time of distress:

- a direct casework referral route was established on the IPA website
- a dedicated webpage was created providing information about available support, the IPA’s role and relevant updates relating to the attack
- hard copy information leaflets were produced and distributed through Family Liaison Officers, ensuring that information reached families via established routes

“

It is hard to find the words to convey the depth of our community’s grief, as we try to process yesterday’s act of unimaginable violence. This desecration of our synagogue, on Yom Kippur of all days, is an episode that has changed us all forever. Two of our beloved members tragically lost their lives, and others remain in hospital with serious injuries.

The loss we feel is beyond words. These were not simply members of our synagogue – they were our friends, our family – and their absence leaves a void that can never be filled.

Even in this valley of deepest sorrow, we have been upheld by extraordinary courage and kindness from so many. We have been strengthened by the countless expressions of solidarity that have poured in, not only from across the Jewish community but from faith leaders, political leaders and neighbours of every background.

In our darkest hour, you have shown us that we do not stand alone. Your embrace reminds us that love and compassion remain stronger than hate.

”

**Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation Leadership (statement issued October 2025)**

## Cultural understanding and community-informed engagement

The location, timing and nature of the attack meant that cultural understanding was essential. For many within the Jewish community, the incident was experienced as part of a wider and longstanding pattern of antisemitism, engaging both collective and intergenerational trauma. Effective advocacy required sensitivity to religious context, community dynamics and the broader climate of fear affecting Jewish communities at that time.

In response:

- a cultural briefing was developed for IPA staff to support informed, respectful engagement
- engagement materials were developed in consultation with community representatives to ensure tone, content and language were appropriate
- statutory partners were consulted to ensure accuracy and consistency of information

These actions were intended to reduce the risk of miscommunication or unintended harm, and to ensure that early engagement reflected a comprehensive understanding of how the attack was experienced by those affected.

## Working alongside the response system

During this period, the IPA established working relationships across the response system, including with Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), local authorities and public health leaders. The IPA joined the Manchester multi-agency Recovery Coordination Group (RCG) within days and remained represented throughout the reporting period.

Attendance at the RCG enabled the IPA to maintain a clear line of sight across the evolving response and to consider how decisions, processes and information flows were experienced from the perspective of those affected.

Throughout this engagement, the IPA was clear about the role's boundaries and did not seek to displace established arrangements or local relationships. Instead, the focus was on helping to ensure that victims and communities were not marginalised within complex institutional processes.

## Engagement with the coronial process

The IPA attended the opening of the inquests into the deaths arising from the attack on 29 and 31 October 2025, at which the coroner confirmed that the IPA was automatically identified as an Interested Person under the statutory framework.

Attendance at these hearings enabled the IPA to gain an understanding of the scope, structure and anticipated trajectory of the forthcoming coronial proceedings.

Ahead of the hearings the IPA also met with the inquest legal team to begin early discussions about how to effectively exercise the role within the coronial process.

## Community engagement and the value of restraint

The attack had far-reaching community impact. Direct engagement with community representatives indicated that some community members were experiencing engagement fatigue, feeling overwhelmed by the number of approaches from different organisations.

In response, the Independent Public Advocate made a decision not to convene her own community listening event during this early stage. The priority was not to add further burden at a point when people were already overwhelmed by multiple approaches and requests for engagement. Instead, engagement continued through sustained contact with key community leaders and representative organisations, including the Community Security Trust and the Jewish Strategic Group, ensuring that concerns could still be raised directly with the IPA without creating additional demands.

The Jewish community affected by the incident has strong internal support networks and well-established organisations providing support to many of those affected. The IPA therefore took a careful and considered approach, working alongside these trusted structures without duplicating or displacing the support already in place, and ensuring that engagement complemented existing provision.

From the outset, the IPA focused on building cultural understanding to support informed and respectful engagement. This approach was underpinned by a clear principle: the IPA's presence should operate alongside, rather than cut across, the trusted frameworks already in place. The focus was on maintaining confidence, providing reassurance, providing independent oversight of the wider statutory response and ensuring that concerns could be raised and escalated where necessary.

This approach remains under continuous review, recognising that needs can evolve over time, and the appropriate level of engagement may change as the longer-term impact of the attack becomes clearer. Community resilience cannot be assumed or taken for granted. Where trusted support structures are already in place, appropriate restraint is a deliberate and necessary part of a trauma-informed intervention.

## Broader engagement

During this period, the IPA engaged with Lord John Mann, who was commissioned in late 2025 to carry out a rapid review into antisemitism and racism within the NHS following the attack.

Given the potential relevance of this work to the deployment, the Office began engagement with the review as it developed, and will continue to consider its findings as part of ongoing work.

## Early casework and those at risk of being overlooked

During the first three months of deployment, the number of formal casework requests was modest. This reflected both the scale of the incident and the presence of well-established and trusted support structures within the Jewish community.

Where casework did arise, it highlighted that individuals beyond those directly impacted (those present, bereaved or injured) can be deeply affected yet can feel that they fall outside traditional victim support frameworks. This included friends, extended family members and informal carers who suddenly assumed significant emotional, practical and coordinating roles in the aftermath, while often receiving little recognition or support.

These individuals described:

- uncertainty about what support was available
- confusion about processes and entitlements
- sudden financial and caring pressures
- being overlooked because they were not a bereaved family member or physically injured

In some cases, the IPA provided practical administrative support and acted as a point of navigation where existing frameworks were not clear. This reinforced the IPA's role in ensuring that people affected by major incidents are not required to piece together support through guesswork or informal networks.

Our casework also exposed a weakness within post-incident support arrangements. Systems centred on physical injury and formal bereavement can overlook those who take on significant caring, practical and emotional responsibilities in the aftermath of major incidents, often while managing trauma and uncertainty themselves.

## Emerging insights into victims' needs

The deployment has provided early insights into a number of issues that impact victims and communities following a major incident:

- a lack of support for carers who step into responsibilities suddenly because of incident-related injuries.
- confusion around financial support and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
- interaction between community fundraising and means-tested benefits

- difficulty accessing government funding quickly without increasing burden on local authorities
- voluntary and community organisations being overwhelmed
- experiences of media intrusion

The IPA will continue to examine and investigate these issues. Where appropriate, the IPA will push for change and raise matters directly to government as part of its advisory function.

## Early reflections

The IPA's first deployment in Manchester demonstrated in real time why the role exists. Deployed before the Office was fully established, the IPA provided early presence, independent oversight and practical support at a moment of acute harm and uncertainty. We worked alongside trusted community structures and the wider response system to ensure that victims and affected communities were not left to navigate complex processes alone.

This deployment also highlighted important learning for how the IPA must operate, particularly when working at pace. In the early stages of an incident, where multiple agencies are communicating simultaneously, it reinforced the critical importance of clear, consistent and accurate information. It also underlined the importance of having robust operational infrastructure in place to support rapid mobilisation.

Operationally, the deployment demonstrated the value of early strategic oversight, clearly mapped governance arrangements, and advance agreements with key partners to enable swift access and coordination. It also emphasised the importance of building trust with local authorities so the IPA can operate as a credible, independent presence.

These insights are already shaping how we strengthen the Office to be more effective in future deployments, in service of victims, survivors, bereaved families and affected communities.

# 06 Visibility, Access and Trust

## Establishing presence in a complex landscape

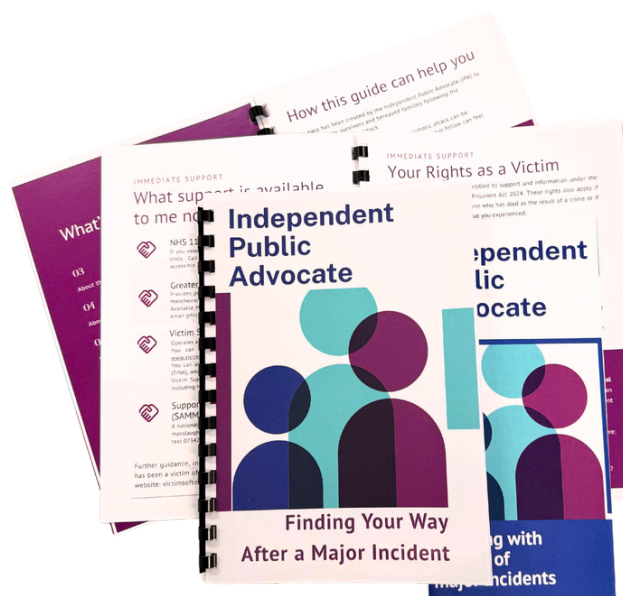
As a new statutory body, early and purposeful engagement was essential to define our remit, demonstrate our independence and integrate effectively into an existing system of responders and stakeholders.

During the reporting period, the IPA met with victims and bereaved families, victims' groups, parliamentarians, statutory partners and organisations already supporting those affected by major incidents. These conversations served a dual purpose: to explain the IPA's statutory role and independence, and to learn directly from those with lived experience of the system's strengths and shortcomings.

## Explaining the role of the IPA

A consistent theme from introductory engagement was the importance of clarity about what the IPA can do, how it operates, and where it sits within the wider system. In response, the Office prioritised developing clear, accessible communications on the IPA's role, powers and limitations.

We began to develop a recognisable organisational voice, shaped by trauma-informed principles and a commitment to plain language. This included explaining the IPA's independence from government and operational partners, the case-by-case nature of deployment and how the role complements, rather than duplicates, existing support.



## Building public understanding

The Office recognised that public understanding of the IPA's role would be essential to building trust and ensuring that victims and bereaved families know how to access support when it is needed. Early communications work focused on establishing a clear and consistent public presence, ensuring that information about the role was accessible, accurate and easy to find.

This included engagement with media, development of public-facing materials and ensuring that the IPA's website and communications reflected the Office's values of independence, compassion and dignity.

# THE STANDARD

## First advocate to support victims after major incidents appointed

Cindy Butts will take up the new role of Independent Public Advocate later this month.



**The Guardian** UK

### Delays to justice after disasters such as Grenfell are 'stain on society', says new victims advocate for England and Wales

Cindy Butts says she's determined to stop victims being forced to investigate for themselves after state failings

**INDEPENDENT CULTURE**

News > UK > Home News

### Victims of synagogue attack will be first to benefit from new support service

**PoliticsHome**

**THEHOUSE**

Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

## Building a system where justice comes without a fight

## Learning from lived experience and shaping delivery

While the IPA can only be formally deployed to major incidents from September 2024 onwards, engagement with victims and bereaved families affected by non-recent major incidents has been an important part of establishing the Office and will continue to shape its approach. These experiences provide critical insight into the long-term impact of navigating multiple investigative and accountability processes, particularly where systems have operated with limited coordination, transparency or candour.

What emerged most clearly was the cumulative burden placed on families over time, and the risk that fragmented responses can compound rather than alleviate harm. That burden is not incidental to the IPA's work; it goes to the reason the role was created. It reinforces the importance of advocacy that is independent, trauma-informed and actively focused on simplifying interactions with public bodies, while also providing an evidence base to identify systemic issues and inform future responses.

Engagement with advocacy organisations, legal practitioners and campaign groups helped the Office understand how the IPA should operate within an established landscape of coronial processes, inquiries and investigations. These discussions clarified boundaries, informed expectations of the role and strengthened alignment with existing support.

This insight continues to inform how the IPA operates in practice, shaping expectations, clarifying boundaries and supporting more coordinated engagement when incidents occur. Learning from non-recent cases is not peripheral to delivery. It is central to ensuring that the Office carries forward lessons Parliament intended the IPA to embed, so that future victims, survivors and bereaved families are not left to navigate the aftermath of major incidents alone.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

#### **INQUEST Lawyers Talk**

*The Independent Public Advocate met with members of the INQUEST Lawyers Group at Doughty Street Chambers to introduce the IPA's role and discuss how independent public advocacy can better support victims, survivors and bereaved families following major incidents. The discussion explored the IPA's independence, its role alongside investigations and inquests, and the IPA's powers, as well as the importance of strong partnerships with specialist victim support organisations.*

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

#### **Public Office (Accountability) Bill/ Hillsborough Law Second Reading**

*The Independent Public Advocate attended the Second Reading of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill in Parliament alongside campaigners from Hillsborough Law Now and members of the Hillsborough families. As the Bill progresses, the IPA will continue to engage with Parliament and stakeholders to help ensure that it reflects what families have fought for over decades.*

## Parliamentary engagement

Engagement with parliamentarians was an important part of the IPA's work during the reporting period. As a new statutory role, it was important that Members of both Houses understood the IPA's purpose, independence and how the role is intended to operate.

We focused on explaining the IPA's statutory remit, the case-by-case nature of deployment and the importance of our independence from government and operational decision-making. Engagement provided an opportunity to listen to concerns raised on behalf of victims and communities, helping to inform the Office's development

## Laying the foundations for the future

Effective independent advocacy depends on the ability to operate confidently across the systems victims and families must navigate following major incidents, including policing, local authorities, health services and national agencies. It also requires establishing, in advance, the relationships and access needed to operate independently and with authority.

Early engagement with system stakeholders has begun to build these relationships and put in place the conditions necessary for effective future deployment. We have also initiated engagement with the Welsh Government to ensure the Office can operate effectively within the distinct Welsh context.

As the Office moves into sustained operation, this work provides a strong platform to support an independent and agile response.



### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

#### Meeting with Summerland Fire Campaigners

*The Independent Public Advocate met with survivors and campaigners from the Summerland Fire to hear directly about their experiences following the 1973 fire in the Isle of Man, which killed 50 people and injured many more. More than 50 years on, survivors described enduring trauma, lack of recognition and the long-term consequences of institutional failure. The conversations reinforced the IPA's commitment to preventing lessons from being lost when attention fades, and to placing transparency, accountability and the experiences of victims and survivors at the centre of major incident responses. The IPA will continue to use her role and platform to support the campaign's pursuit of justice and accountability.*

# 07 Governance and Accountability

This chapter summarises the governance and accountability arrangements of the Independent Public Advocate (IPA) and the Office of the IPA during the reporting period. As this is the IPA's inaugural annual report, covering the first three months of operation, arrangements were necessarily proportionate and, in some areas, interim.

## Governance and Assurance

Responsibility for the direction, decisions and delivery of statutory functions rests solely with the Independent Public Advocate.

Given the scale and maturity of the organisation during the reporting period:

- governance and assurance arrangements were deliberately proportionate, enabling the Office to operate lawfully, safely and independently under acute operational pressure.
- interim decision-making arrangements were introduced at pace to support early deployment and protect credibility;
- engagement with the MoJ sponsor team provided appropriate oversight and assurance during establishment.

The Office worked with the MoJ to develop a Framework Agreement setting out respective roles, responsibilities and accountability arrangements between the IPA and the Department. This Framework Agreement remained in development at the end of the reporting period.

## Accountability to Parliament

The IPA engaged with Members of Parliament and Peers to support understanding of the role and its statutory functions.

During the reporting period, the IPA also gave evidence to the Public Office (Accountability) Bill Committee on matters related to the IPA's remit.

## Advisory Arrangements and External Insight

The IPA has identified the importance of ensuring that the role is informed by external expertise and the lived experience of those affected by major incidents. Work began during the reporting period to consider future advisory arrangements to support learning, challenge and reflection as the Office develops.

## Financial Management

The Office of the IPA is funded by public expenditure approved by Parliament. Financial activity during the reporting period focused on essential establishment and deployment costs. Expenditure was managed in accordance with Managing Public Money principles, using interim financial controls while permanent arrangements were developed with the sponsor department.

The reporting period does not represent a full financial year. The IPA's expenditure is consolidated within the MoJ Annual Report and Accounts. The IPA is the delegated budget holder.

The IPA's budget for the 2025/26 financial year is £552,000. A full breakdown of expenditure for the year will be provided in the IPA's next annual report.

## Public Sector Equality Duty

The IPA is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. Equality considerations were embedded from the outset, including a trauma-informed approach to engagement, awareness of cultural and community impacts following major incidents, and early steps to ensure public communications were clear, accessible and sensitive.

## Freedom of Information

The Office of the IPA is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. No Freedom of Information requests were received during the reporting period.

## Data Protection and Information Governance

The Office has published a Privacy Notice explaining how personal data is collected, used and protected, and how individuals can exercise their rights.

# 08 The Next Phase

These first months have demonstrated both the importance of independent advocacy and the scale of what is still required to ensure the role is fully operational, resilient and prepared for the future. Alongside continuing deployment activity and support for those affected by the Heaton Park Synagogue attack, the Office is now moving into its next phase of development.

These early months have underlined a fundamental point: the effectiveness of independent advocacy is determined long before it is tested. Trust, operational credibility and preparedness cannot be improvised in the aftermath of major harm; they must be built, tested and sustained in advance.

Over the coming year, my priorities as Independent Public Advocate are:

1. Readiness, Resilience and Operational Capability
2. Building trust, relationships and credibility
3. Strengthening awareness and understanding of the IPA's role
4. Responding to and learning from the Heaton Park Synagogue deployment

In parallel, the Office will publish a strategic plan, setting out its long-term objectives, whilst retaining the flexibility required to respond to evolving circumstances.

## Readiness, Resilience and Operational Capability

A central priority for me is ensuring that the Office can respond rapidly and effectively to future major incidents by embedding continuous readiness into the IPA's operating model.

Over the coming year, the Office will complete its organisational set-up, with core systems, governance arrangements and operational processes fully established and able to support victims and bereaved families beyond the immediate aftermath of an incident. Preparedness will be strengthened through clear deployment protocols, readiness arrangements and securing a sustainable funding model that enables both immediate response and long-term support.

We will also build organisational resilience through recruiting additional staff and supporting the appointment of further Advocates, while embedding trauma-informed support to ensure the Office is equipped to operate effectively in demanding environments.

At the same time, investment in infrastructure, including coordination, case management and information-sharing systems, will be critical to effective responses. This includes ensuring

access to specialist expertise, including legal advice that is both timely and demonstrably independent, particularly where public authorities may themselves be under scrutiny.

## Building and sustaining relationships and credibility

The Office will continue to develop working relationships with statutory partners, including government departments, emergency responders and other public authorities, to ensure that its role is understood and embedded within wider incident response arrangements. Emphasis will be placed on strengthening relationships with non-statutory partners, including community organisations, victim support organisations, and importantly bereaved families and survivors from previous incidents. Building confidence among these groups will be essential in establishing the Office as a credible and trusted source of independent support.

We will expand our engagement in Wales, ensuring that our role is understood and operates effectively across different national contexts. We will also develop more structured victim and stakeholder engagement mechanisms to provide structured input, challenge and support.

## Strengthening awareness and understanding of the Office

As a new statutory office, improving awareness and understanding of the IPA's role and remit is critical to its effectiveness. We will prioritise ensuring that statutory stakeholders across the system have a clear understanding of when and how the Office should be engaged, and the role it plays in supporting those affected by major incidents.

We will also focus on making information more accessible, so that those we exist to support understand what is available to them and how to engage with the Office if needed.

My aim is to ensure that, in the event of a future incident, there is no ambiguity about the Office's role, remit and purpose.

## Responding to and learning from the Heaton Park Synagogue deployment

The ongoing response to the Heaton Park Synagogue attack will remain a central focus of my work over the coming year. This includes continuing to provide support to those affected, while also ensuring that the experience of this incident is used to strengthen future practice.

A key priority will be supporting victims and bereaved families in advance of and throughout the forthcoming inquest process, recognising that these proceedings can be complicated, lengthy and challenging. We will continue to strengthen our understanding of how the response to the incident has been experienced, drawing out learning to inform both ongoing work and future deployments. This will focus on how effectively systems have operated, the experience of those directly affected and where there are opportunities for improvement across organisations and processes.

## Final Reflections

Major incidents involve complex and often fragmented systems, multiple public authorities, overlapping legal processes and large numbers of organisations operating simultaneously. To support victims and bereaved families effectively, the Office must understand those systems in depth and be capable of navigating them confidently and independently. In many respects, the Office must know the system better than the system knows itself.

The development of wider system reforms will also be critical. I am in full support of the charity INQUEST's campaign for a National Oversight Mechanism (NOM) - an independent body responsible for collating, analysing and following up on recommendations arising from inquests, inquiries and investigations. The absence of a consistent mechanism to ensure recommendations are acted upon has long been identified as a gap in accountability. Establishing a NOM would be a significant step towards strengthening accountability and making sure that lessons are not just identified but acted upon, and I will continue to press for its delivery.

The next phase will therefore focus not only on building the Office itself, but on strengthening the wider systems, relationships and culture that shape how this country responds to major incidents, and how victims and bereaved families experience that response.

The ongoing Parliamentary consideration of the Hillsborough Bill is also central to this work. I will continue to engage with Parliament to strengthen the Bill, supporting coherence across the accountability framework, robust monitoring of candour during major incidents and meaningful victim and survivor voice in its implementation and oversight.

While the Office remains in establishment and significant work lies ahead, the progress made to date, and the willingness of individuals, organisations and communities to engage constructively, provides a strong foundation for the future.

The priority now is to translate these foundations into consistent, credible delivery. When the Office is called upon, it must be ready to respond with authority, clarity and compassion. This role exists because the system has failed in the past. Its purpose is to ensure that it does not fail in the same way again—so that, in the aftermath of major harm, victims, survivors and bereaved families are met not with silence or resistance, but with openness, accountability and justice.



**Cindy Butts**

Independent Public Advocate for England and Wales

E03607983E  
978-1-5286-6572-8