


Making public inquiry recommendations work

23 April 2025  Noah Libson

It was announced earlier this month that the Infected Blood Inquiry will hold two more days of hearings on 7 and 8 of May to address concerns regarding the Government's response to compensation.

These hearings will come almost a year after the final report was published by the Chair, Sir Brian Langstaff.

As my colleague Stephanie McGarry has written, public inquiries have been a key lever in shedding light on people who have suffered wrongdoing, particularly at the hands of the state, and they provide a useful forum for victims and survivors to have their voices heard. Their focus on learning, by issuing recommendations, aims to rectify faults and ensure there is not a future repetition of these incidents. However, do the upcoming hearings in the Infected Blood Inquiry show that public inquiries need stronger powers to ensure accountability?

Do public inquiries need stronger powers to ensure accountability?

The House of Lords Statutory Inquiries Committee published a report titled 'Public Inquiries: Enhancing Public Trust' in September 2024, and the Government acknowledged their findings on 10 February 2025.

In their response, the Government agreed that more work needed to be done to implement recommendations from inquiries, and an update to the relevant legislative framework may be required to ensure this. Currently, the Government can reject statutory inquiry recommendations without needing to provide reasons.

How can public inquiries be improved?

Implementing a statutory requirement for the Government to respond to and act on inquiry recommendations has the potential to be a pivotal step.

This could be further strengthened by public transparency measures, such as regular reporting on the progress of implementing inquiry recommendations, and efforts to involve the public in the inquiry process itself. There are various ways in which this could be achieved, including inquiries establishing advisory panels that include victims and public representatives to input into the inquiry's progress and contribute to the formulation of recommendations.

It can be said that for public inquiries to fulfil their intended role of fostering accountability and preventing recurrence of failures, their recommendations must be taken seriously and implemented effectively.

Legislative changes, with the addition of increased public involvement, and greater transparency in the monitoring of these recommendations would be critical steps towards achieving this goal. These measures would ensure that public inquiries result in meaningful changes and ensure that the experiences of victims will be taken into account during the decision-making process.

What's next?

Those with an interest in public inquiries will be watching the new hearings of the Infected Blood Inquiry closely, to ascertain what steps Sir Brian Langstaff may take to ensure the Government, and the recently established Infected Blood Compensation Authority are held to

account and whether they will commit to more urgent action.

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