



Justice Committee

The Right Honourable Shabana Mahmood MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of State for Justice

By email only
Copied to Alex Davies-Jones MP, Parliamentary
Under-Secretary of State

4 September 2025

Dear Shabana

STANDING ADVOCATE

As you will be aware, following the pre-appointment hearing last week the Committee endorsed the appointment of Cindy Butts as Standing Advocate. We found her to be an outstanding candidate and have every confidence that she has the skills, experience and independence of mind necessary to carry out the role effectively.

We were, however, very concerned to hear during the session that, despite having asked, Ms Butts had received no indication from the Department as to the budget for the Independent Public Advocate. She told us that the only information she had in this regard was an annual figure of £500,000 in an equalities impact assessment published in 2018 under the previous government which would, in her view, be “wholly inadequate” for the work required by the role.

We agree. The role of Standing Advocate is an extremely challenging one, having to support a potentially significant number of victims and bereaved families at the most difficult time in their lives, including through the lengthy processes that follow major incidents, and meet their complex and varied needs. It is imperative that the Standing Advocate and her office receive a level of resourcing and staffing, including access to independent legal advice, commensurate to this and sufficient for her to fulfil her statutory responsibilities, as victims rightly deserve. There is a real risk that, unless sufficiently resourced, victims and bereaved families will not receive the level of support that they require, compounding their already significant suffering.

As outlined by Ms Butts, we believe that the office of Independent Public Advocate needs a particularly substantial budget in its early phase, with the Standing Advocate in post full time, to set up the organisation and establish its ways of



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working so that it is ready to be deployed following a major incident and also to support victims of disasters that have already occurred. After this initial phase, the budget could be reduced on the basis that it would be scaled up once the office is deployed following a major incident.

Overall, after hearing from Ms Butts, we were left with the impression that the Department has not given sufficient consideration to the practicalities of the work and its potentially significant scale. We felt that Ms Butts clearly has a good idea of what is entailed and the processes that are needed to be established. In the future, the Department may find it difficult to attract candidates of the quality of Ms Butts to senior public positions unless it provides more clarity during the recruitment process on the resourcing and budget they will have access to once in post.

We also wish to express our concern that it has taken an unduly long amount of time, around nine months, to recruit a candidate to this important role. You indicated to the Committee that you expected to identify your preferred candidate in March 2025 with a view to holding the pre-appointment hearing in May. In the event, we did not receive confirmation of the candidate's identity until 25 June 2025. In our view, the pace of recruitment for senior public appointments is too slow, and we would be grateful if you could explain what steps the Department plans to take to speed recruitment up.

I look forward to hearing your response to the issues raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee