



Blind Justice

The Memory of Justice

How long justice remembers

A Blind Justice UK research briefing | July 2026

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The second briefing in Blind Justice UK's transparency research series

This document is a research briefing prepared by Blind Justice UK (Registered Charity No. 1217562). The analysis is based on publicly available data and does not constitute legal advice.

WHAT THIS BRIEFING REVEALS

Twelve of the bodies that decide complaints and discipline across British public life were audited on four questions: do they publish their decisions, in full or in summary, in a searchable form, and for how long.

The answers run from sixty years to no published individual decisions. The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal keeps a strike-off on public record for sixty years; its oldest judgment still online dates from 1999. The Financial Ombudsman Service retains all the final decisions it has published since April 2013, with publication the general rule subject to a limited exception. The Legal Ombudsman, the consumer redress scheme for legal services, removes its published decision data rows after twelve months and does not publish the underlying reasoned decisions. The Energy Ombudsman publishes no individual decisions.

A solicitor's disciplinary record can remain public for sixty years. The public record of a consumer's complaint outcome against a law firm disappears after twelve months.

1. Executive summary

The Invisible Ombudsman, published by Blind Justice UK in July 2026, established how much of the Legal Ombudsman's published record had disappeared: more than 11,000 named decisions published and then removed from public view over fourteen years. This follow-up asks whether that twelve-month memory is normal among comparable public decision-makers. It is not.

When a professional is judged, the public record of that judgment can last a working lifetime. When a consumer wins a complaint, the record may last a year, or never exist at all. This briefing is, to our knowledge, the first public cross-sector audit to combine publication form, searchability, retention policy and observed archive depth across twelve ombudsman schemes, regulators and disciplinary tribunals, using only their own websites, their own published policies, and their own live databases.

The audit finds three tiers. An observed permanence tier, led by the Financial Ombudsman Service and the Information Commissioner, publishes full decisions with no stated removal limit, and this audit observed no removal of earlier published decisions: the Financial Ombudsman database retains all the final decisions it has published since 1 April 2013, the Information Commissioner's archive of 26,186 decision notices reaches back to 2005, and the Pensions Ombudsman's to 2001. A published rule tier, led by the professional tribunals, removes decisions on a stated schedule that keeps the gravest findings visible longest: sixty years for a solicitor struck off or a barrister disbarred. And a tier of outliers, where the record is short, thin, or absent: the Legal Ombudsman's twelve-month rolling window of data rows; the Energy Ombudsman's decision to publish no individual decisions at all; and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's decisions portal, in which this audit found no decision dated after 28 March 2024. The PHSO has been asked to explain.

The pattern matters because publication is not decoration. It is how consumers check a provider's record, how patterns of failure become visible, and how the public tests whether a scheme's decisions are consistent and fair. The Financial Ombudsman demonstrates that long-term, high-volume, anonymised publication is operationally feasible. The question is therefore not whether it can be done, but why some bodies maintain little or no enduring public record.

2. Method

Each body was audited on four questions: (1) does it publish individual decisions at all; (2) in full or in summary; (3) through a public searchable database; and (4) for how long, as stated in any published retention or removal policy and as observed in the live database. Every entry was verified on 27 July 2026 directly against the body's own website: policies were read in their published form and quoted verbatim, and each live database was queried to its oldest visible entry. Nothing in this briefing rests on secondary reporting. Where permanence is observed practice rather than stated policy, the briefing says so; where a source could not be verified, the entry is marked accordingly. A full source list appears at section 9.

Selection of bodies

The twelve bodies form a purposive rather than exhaustive sample. They were selected for institutional scale, public significance, the availability or notable absence of individual determinations, and their usefulness as comparators. The sample includes the major consumer redress schemes, the information rights regulator, and professional disciplinary bodies in law, medicine and nursing. Jurisdictional scope varies between them, some operating across the United Kingdom and others principally in England or England and Wales; each body's jurisdiction is recorded in the evidence annex, and the comparisons in this briefing concern publication practice, not jurisdictional coverage. The sample is not intended to be exhaustive, and the method can be applied to any additional body.

Searchability classifications

In the comparison table, searchable means the public can search decisions by free text or structured fields; browsable means decisions can be reviewed through chronological or categorical lists without meaningful full search; downloadable data means structured records can be downloaded or filtered but the reasoned decisions themselves are not available; none means no individual records are published.

The three regimes at a glance

THE PATTERN IN ONE VIEW

Observed permanence (no stated removal limit; no removals observed): Financial Ombudsman Service, Information Commissioner, Pensions Ombudsman, Housing Ombudsman.

Scheduled removal (a published rule; the gravest findings kept longest): Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal, Bar (BTAS/BSB), Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, GMC/MPTS, Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Little or no publication (short window, data only, stalled, or nothing): Legal Ombudsman, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (stalled), Energy Ombudsman.

3. The comparison table

Four measures are recorded for each body and must be read separately: publication form (full decision, summary, data row, or nothing, and who is named), searchability, retention regime (indefinite, fixed period, sanction-linked, or unstated), and observed archive depth (the oldest live entry verified on 27 July 2026). A body with no removal rule is not ranked below a sixty-year rule merely because it began publishing later; no composite ranking is intended.

Correction note, 14 August 2026. As first published, this table recorded the Legal Ombudsman's publication form as data rows only. On 14 August 2026 the Legal Ombudsman drew our attention to its Public Interest Decisions scheme, under which selected ombudsman decisions have been published in full since July 2025, 27 at the date of this correction, each remaining online for twelve months in line with its wider removal policy. The table and section 6 have been corrected accordingly, in line with the commitment in our open letter of 28 July 2026 to correct promptly on notification. The correction does not alter the findings on retention.

Body	Publication form (and who is named)	Searchability	Retention regime	Oldest live entry observed
Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal	Full judgments; solicitor named	Searchable	Up to 60 years (strike-off); 3 year minimum otherwise (published policy)	1999
Bar (BTAS / BSB)	Full findings and reports; barrister named	Searchable	Up to 60 years (disbarment); tiered 2, 5, 10 years otherwise (published policy)	2013 (oldest full BTAS report; BSB search covers findings since 2002)
Pensions Ombudsman	Full determinations; respondent named	Searchable	No removal policy; 25 years observed	2001
Information Commissioner (FOIA decision notices)	Full notices (26,186 live at 27 July 2026); authority named	Searchable	No removal policy; 21 years observed	2005
Financial Ombudsman Service	Every published final decision, full text; firm named	Searchable	No removal policy; retained since 1 April 2013	2013
Housing Ombudsman	Investigated decisions in full, subject to limited exceptions (approximately 17,200 live at 27 July 2026); landlord named	Searchable	No stated limit; no removals observed	2019 (one entry; site states from December 2020)
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	Full decision statements; council named	Searchable	5 years (statements); 10 years (reports) (published policy)	2016 (report)
GMC / MPTS	Full determinations; doctor named	Register searchable; decisions browsable	Website: 1 year. Register: 2 to 15 years by sanction; erasure 10 years (published policy)	2025 (website window)
Nursing and Midwifery Council	Panel reasons against register entry; nurse or	Register searchable;	Duration of the order; strike-off 5 years	2014 (live order)

	midwife named	outcomes browsable	(published policy)	
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	Full decisions (portal); organisation named	Searchable	No removal policy; no decision published after 28 March 2024	2020
Legal Ombudsman	Data rows only, no reasoning; provider named. Exception: selected Public Interest Decisions in full since July 2025, 27 to date (see correction note)	Downloadable data; filterable table	12 months, then removed (published policy)	Rolling year (939 rows live at 27 July 2026)
Energy Ombudsman	No individual decisions	None	Not applicable	None

4. The observed permanence tier: transparency as the default

Four bodies publish full decisions with no stated retention limit, and this audit observed no removal of earlier published decisions. The Financial Ombudsman Service, operating under a statutory publication duty in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 as amended in 2012, states that its database ‘holds all the final decisions we’ve published since 1 April 2013’, anonymised as to the complainant and naming the firm; publication is the general rule, subject to a limited exception where the ombudsman considers it inappropriate. This audit verified that decisions from the first day of publication remain live: thirteen years of retained, searchable, full-text publication at a volume of tens of thousands of decisions.

The Information Commissioner’s Office publishes every freedom of information decision notice in full, naming the public authority; the live database holds 26,186 notices and its oldest, concerning Westminster City Council, dates from February 2005. The Pensions Ombudsman’s searchable archive of full determinations reaches back to March 2001. The Housing Ombudsman publishes investigated decisions in full, subject to limited stated exceptions, naming the landlord. Its live archive showed 1,722 pages of results on 27 July 2026, representing approximately 17,200 decisions. This is broadly consistent with its 2024-25 annual report, which recorded 9,900 published decision reports at March 2025, followed by a further year of publication. Its own page states the decisions date from December 2020 and are published three months after the final decision.

None of these bodies publishes a retention limit, and none was observed to remove decisions. Between them they demonstrate the operational feasibility of full publication, complainant anonymity and provider naming, at scale, over decades.

5. The published rule tier: the gravest findings kept longest

A second group removes decisions, but on a published schedule that the public can read, and the schedules share a principle: the more serious the finding, the longer it stays. The Solicitors Disciplinary

Tribunal's publication policy states that its judgments 'remain documents of public record indefinitely' and keeps a strike-off on its website for sixty years; its oldest judgment still online dates from 1999. The Bar's tribunal service keeps a disbarment published for sixty years, suspensions for five or ten years beyond their end, and everything for at least two years. The General Medical Council's policy keeps an erasure visible against the register for ten years and a long suspension for fifteen; the Nursing and Midwifery Council keeps a striking off visible for five. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman states plainly that 'decision statements are kept for 5 years' and public interest reports for ten, and its live database matches its policy exactly.

These schedules can be debated. Their principal advantage is that the retention rules are generally published and therefore open to public scrutiny and challenge.

6. The outliers

The Legal Ombudsman: twelve months, then gone

Among the complaint schemes audited that publish individual outcomes, the Legal Ombudsman combines the shortest general publication window with the least substantive information. With the exception of 27 selected Public Interest Decisions published in full since July 2025, and themselves subject to the same twelve month removal, it does not publish its decisions: it publishes data rows, the provider's name, the date, the area of law, the remedy, with no reasoning of any kind. Its policy states that 'each decision remains published for 12 months from the date of publication', after which the public is directed to the Freedom of Information Act. At the date of this audit the live file contained 939 rows. Blind Justice UK's July 2026 research, *The Invisible Ombudsman*, documented the cumulative effect: more than 11,000 named decisions published and then removed from public view over fourteen years.

The comparison that matters is not with perfection but with the Legal Ombudsman's own neighbours. The profession's disciplinary tribunal keeps a solicitor's strike off on the record for sixty years. The consumer scheme for the same profession deletes the consumer's outcome after twelve months. A member of the public can research a solicitor disciplinary judgment from 1999 tonight; the outcome of a service complaint decided in early 2024 has already vanished. The Legal Ombudsman is presently consulting on its scheme rules, case fees and the publication of decisions, a consultation that closes on 2 September 2026, and this briefing is intended in part as evidence to it.

One point of fairness should be acknowledged. Professional discipline and consumer redress are not perfectly equivalent regimes: they have different purposes and legal bases, and the Legal Ombudsman has itself identified restricted information and legal professional privilege as complications for fuller publication. Those complications are real, but they bear on how much of a decision can be published, not on how long a published record should survive. They may explain caution about full text. They do not explain deleting even the data rows after twelve months.

THE POLICY, IN THE LEGAL OMBUDSMAN'S OWN WORDS

'Each decision remains published for 12 months from the date of publication.' Ombudsman decision data page, verified 27 July 2026.

The Energy Ombudsman: nothing at all

The Energy Ombudsman publishes no individual decisions in any form: eight anonymised case studies and quarterly complaint statistics stand in for a published record. A consumer choosing an energy supplier can learn how many complaints a supplier generated, but never how any complaint was decided, or why.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman: a record that stopped

The PHSO began routinely publishing casework decisions in April 2021, in full, naming the organisations complained about, through a searchable portal. This audit enumerated every decision in that portal, 1,441 in total, and found none dated after 28 March 2024. No announcement of a pause was found, and no removal policy exists. Blind Justice UK wrote to the PHSO on 28 July 2026, asking whether routine publication has ceased and, if so, when, by whose decision and why. A response was requested by 14 August 2026, and any response received will be published in full alongside this briefing.

A note on housekeeping

Two smaller findings illustrate how lightly some publication regimes are maintained. The Housing Ombudsman's formal publication policy, linked from its own guidance, returns a dead page, so the public cannot currently read the rules under which more than 17,000 decisions are published. And the Nursing and Midwifery Council's policy says recent outcomes are listed for four months while its live page says three. Blind Justice UK wrote to the Housing Ombudsman on 28 July 2026, asking for the current publication policy and drawing attention to the dead link. A response was requested by 14 August 2026, and any response received will be published in full alongside this briefing.

7. Why this matters for access to justice

The public record of decisions is the only systematic, independent institutional memory available to consumers. It is how a person choosing a solicitor, a landlord, a pension provider or a care service learns whether the provider has a history; it is how researchers, journalists and Parliament detect patterns; and it is how a scheme's own consistency can be tested from outside. Where the record is full and permanent, as at the Financial Ombudsman, that memory works. Where it is thin, short or absent, the same failure can repeat, provider by provider, year by year, without a systematic public record through which the pattern can be detected.

For legal services the asymmetry is acute. The consumer of legal services is often dealing with some of the most consequential and vulnerable circumstances of their life, and the sector's own tribunals show that long-term online publication is already practised under existing legal and regulatory frameworks. The audit found no published legal or regulatory requirement imposing a twelve-month limit. The limit appears to be a policy choice rather than a demonstrated legal inevitability, and it is the outlier's choice.

The four questions asked here are not particular to ombudsman schemes. They can be asked of any body that decides matters affecting the public: regulators, inquiries, police complaints bodies, standards committees and tribunals. This briefing is the first application of a framework Blind Justice UK intends to apply to further sectors.

8. Recommendations

To the Office for Legal Complaints and the Legal Ombudsman, in the current consultation

1. Publish reasoned ombudsman decisions, with complainants anonymised and providers named, subject only to a narrow and published exception and redaction policy addressing legal privilege, restricted information and identification risk, as the Financial Ombudsman model demonstrates is workable.
2. Make permanence the default: decisions should remain published indefinitely, and any removal rule should be published and justified.
3. Restore to public view the historical decision data rows removed under the twelve-month policy.

To the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

4. Resume publication of casework decisions, publish the decisions made since March 2024, and state publicly whether and why publication was paused.

To the Energy Ombudsman

5. Begin publishing reasoned, anonymised decisions in a searchable archive, with providers named where lawful and proportionate.

To all schemes and tribunals

6. Publish a retention policy: whatever the rule is, the public should be able to read it. Bodies with no stated rule should state one, even if the rule is permanence.
7. Where decisions are removed on a schedule, align retention with gravity, as the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal and the Bar already do.

To the Legal Services Board

8. Treat publication and retention standards as part of the oversight of legal services redress, and benchmark the Legal Ombudsman against the Financial Ombudsman model.

THE THREE IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

Publish reasoned Legal Ombudsman decisions.

Restore the historical decision data record.

Resume PHSO publication.

9. Sources and verification

All findings were verified on 27 July 2026 against the following primary sources: the Financial Ombudsman Service decisions database and publication statement; the Information Commissioner's decision notices database; the Pensions Ombudsman decisions database and published approach; the Housing Ombudsman decisions archive and guidance; the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decisions database and published retention statement; the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal judgments database and Judgment Publication Policy (May 2020); the Bar Tribunals and Adjudication Service findings database and Publication Policy, with the Bar Standards Board policy LED24; the General Medical Council's Publication and Disclosure Policy (updated August 2025) and the MPTS decisions pages; the Nursing and Midwifery Council's publication guidance (version 9, April 2026) and live sanctions pages; the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman decisions portal and its public interface; the Energy Ombudsman's data and case studies pages; and the Legal Ombudsman's decision data pages, publication policy statement and 2026 consultation. The full evidence file, recording for each entry the precise source, access date, query used and observed result, is published alongside this briefing as an annex: a transparency report should make its own evidence transparent. For the PHSO finding in particular, the annex preserves the portal address, the enumeration method, the date field used, the handling of duplicates and the complete extracted dataset, so that the finding can be independently reproduced.

Limitations. Where a body publishes no retention policy, permanence is described as observed practice, not policy. Two policies could be read only through automated extraction of the published document; their wording was cross-checked across independent retrievals. The oldest entry visible on one decisions list could not be fixed to the day because of how the page loads. These limitations do not affect the principal classifications or the briefing's central conclusions.

Blind Justice UK (Registered Charity No. 1217562) works to transform access to justice through direct support, technology innovation, and systemic reform.