

An Eye reader who wrote to the Eye's Letter page to criticise the CPPIH, the government body set up to encourage public involvement in the debate about the health service, has been personally threatened with libel proceedings ... by the CPPIH.

The Commission for Patient and public Involvement in Health, which is part of the structure that replaced Community Health Councils (CHCs), is soon to be scrapped by the government but is obviously still very sensitive to criticism.

Undeterred, Malcolm Alexander, a former Director of the Association of Community Health Councils, and Chair of the London Ambulance Service Patients' Forum, has criticised it for being both too secretive and too supine in challenging the NHS.

On a website for the independent Patient and Public Involvement Forum Organisations, he said the Commission 'has a hopeless inexperienced leadership' – (its Chair, Sharon Grant's background is as a social policy lecturer, councillor and parliamentary secretary to husband Bernie Grant). And in a letter to Eye 1108, he said that Grant 'is being disingenuous when she claims that the new patient involvement is a success'.

Feathers at the CPPIH were so ruffled by this honest comment, that lawyers Hill Dickinson, have been engaged and have threatened to 'immediately commence a high court action' for defamation against Mr. Alexander in person unless he makes a public apology.

It's unusual to go for a letter-writer who cannot afford a lawyer, let alone damages, rather than the magazine or website which published his views. But that's how seriously public involvement in the NHS debate is viewed under 'new' Labour.

Writer unknown

