

The Silence Report: Whistleblowing and Harassment Across the UK





Key takeaways



- **On 18 December 2025, the Employee Rights Bill became law as the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA), marking the most significant overhaul of UK employment protections in generations.**
- **The Act strengthens employers' statutory duty to prevent sexual harassment and, for the first time, extends whistleblowing protections to sexual harassment disclosures.**
- **Using publicly available Freedom of Information (FOI) data, Skillcast analysed how rising sexual harassment helpline calls are feeding into whistleblowing activity across UK councils.**
- **The findings highlight gaps in internal accountability and where employees may feel unable or unwilling to report wrongdoing.**
- **Triple-digit increases in whistleblowing across multiple councils point to a decisive shift towards employees speaking up.**

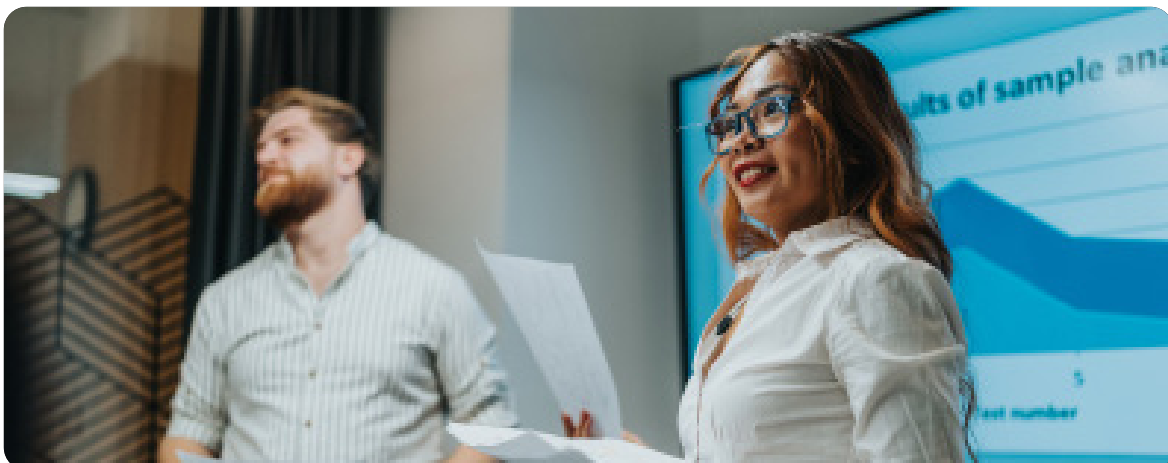


A new ERA - How the Employment Rights Act 2025 will modernise workplace rights

In recent years, reports of sexual harassment in the workplace have increased. This shift is widely attributed to cultural changes, including the impact of the [#MeToo movement](#). Behaviour that might once have been tolerated, joked about, or quietly endured is now more clearly recognised as unacceptable.

The Employment Rights Act underwent rounds of review before becoming law where it has been decided that protection from unfair dismissal will begin after six months of continuous employment, rather than on day one as initially proposed.

A new [Fair Work Agency](#) will oversee enforcement, while employers, particularly SMEs, will need to update contracts, probation processes, and workforce planning to comply with the upcoming changes, which take effect from April 2026.



The Employment Rights Act and sexual harassment

Recent reports have revealed that sexual harassment helpline calls in the workplace have increased by [nearly 40%](#) in the last year. Meanwhile, recent data also reveals that [nearly one in seven](#) workers has experienced workplace abuse, whether in the form of inappropriate jokes, comments or unwanted touching in the workplace.

This comes as the Employment Rights Act is set to expand whistleblowing protections, requiring organisations to provide safer, more robust channels for employees to raise concerns. Under the new legislation, sexual harassment will be recognised as a protected disclosure, giving employees the same legal safeguards against detriment or unfair dismissal as any other whistleblower.

Employees increasingly expect employers to act, and are more willing to challenge inaction when they don't. The prospect of stronger protections, such as those under the Employment Rights Act, may also be giving workers greater confidence that speaking up will not automatically jeopardise their job.

While external helplines and surveys provide valuable insight into the [prevalence of workplace sexual harassment](#), they do not show how often employees are using formal, protected reporting mechanisms inside their organisations. Whistleblowing data offers a useful lens here, as it captures the point at which individuals move from recognising harm to formally disclosing it through official channels.



To assess this, Skillcast submitted Freedom of Information requests to city and county councils across the UK, requesting data on whistleblowing reports over the past four years. The aim was not simply to measure volume, but to identify whether increased awareness and confidence around reporting sexual harassment is being recognised within [whistleblowing frameworks](#) across local authorities.

This approach helps to highlight whether councils' internal reporting systems are keeping pace with changing expectations around workplace safety and accountability, or whether a gap remains between external reporting trends and internal disclosure.

The report highlights potential weaknesses in the council's accountability, internal culture, and employee confidence, suggesting that employees are still hesitant to [report sexual harassment](#) internally, even as external data shows incidents climbing.

Skillcast's analysis identifies whether rising awareness of sexual harassment is translating into formal internal reporting - not only about overall whistleblowing volumes, but specifically regarding the number of sexual harassment cases reported through [whistleblowing channels](#).

By comparing these figures over time, Skillcast's analysis identifies councils where whistleblowing activity is increasing, stagnating, or appears minimal or absent. The findings offer insight into where internal accountability frameworks may be insufficient and where employees may feel unable or unwilling to report wrongdoing.



What is the Employment Rights Act?



The [Employment Rights Act \(ERA\)](#) is designed to reshape UK labour law for the mid-2020s. From 6 April 2026, employees will benefit from enhanced day-one rights and additional safeguards when raising concerns under whistleblowing law. ERA represents a comprehensive overhaul aimed at rebalancing power between employers and employees - strengthening workers' rights while providing businesses with clearer rules around work practices.

At its core, [the Act seeks to make work fairer and more secure](#). It proposes to extend and modernise statutory protections from the very start of employment, while also giving employers a stable and predictable legal framework.

Following revisions to the original proposals, the Bill introduced a mix of day-one rights and extended protections after six months of service. On 18 December 2025, the Employment Rights Bill became law and is now **the Employment Rights Act 2025**.

This Act comes in response to long-standing criticism that UK employment law has not kept pace with modern work. Challenges such as zero-hours contracts, unpredictable shifts, and limited protections for carers and parents have left many workers vulnerable, undermining job security, wellbeing, and fairness across sectors.





Under the Employment Rights Act proposals, a worker who raises concerns that "sexual harassment has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur" could be making a protected disclosure, qualifying for [whistleblowing protections](#) - provided other legal requirements are met.

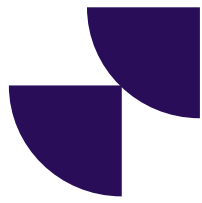
Key protections include:

- **No detriment:** Workers cannot be treated unfairly (e.g., passed over for promotion) as a result of making a protected disclosure.
- **Automatic unfair dismissal:** If an employee is dismissed primarily for making a protected disclosure, the dismissal is automatically considered unfair, allowing the employee to claim uncapped compensation through an Employment Tribunal.



This amendment follows extensive lobbying by employee and whistleblower protection groups. However, claimants must demonstrate that their disclosure was made in the "public interest". This requirement applies to most protected disclosures and is intended to distinguish whistleblowing from purely personal workplace grievances.





Whistleblowing cases - by council

Despite rising reports of sexual harassment nationally, Skillcast's research suggests these experiences are rarely captured through formal whistleblowing channels.

As mentioned, the Freedom of Information request asked for the number of whistleblowing reports over the past four calendar years, focusing on changes between 2023 and 2024, as these were the most recent full calendar years available.

These data points were analysed to identify trends and highlight areas with notable increases in whistleblowing cases, shedding light on emerging workplace concerns.

Skillcast undertook this research to better understand how effectively UK organisations are enabling employees to [speak up](#) - and where gaps in protection, culture, or reporting systems still remain.



Council	Year-on-Year difference in reporting for whistleblowing cases
Doncaster Council	250.00%
Warrington Borough Council	200.00%
Southend Council	100.00%
Nottingham City Council	100.00%
Wigan Council	100.00%
Belfast City Council	80.00%
Swindon Borough Council	75.00%
City of Wolverhampton Council	33.33%
Basildon Council	27.27%
Blackburn Council	20.00%
Glasgow City Council	0.00%
Bath & North East Somerset Council	0.00%
Wakefield Council	0.00%
Surrey County Council	-9.52%
Hull City Council	-31.43%
Leeds City Council	-40.98%

The sharp year-on-year rise in whistleblowing reports across multiple councils - including Doncaster (up 250%), Warrington (200%), and Southend, Nottingham, and Wigan (all up 100%) - points to a growing willingness among employees to call out organisational misconduct. This is a sign of improving workplace transparency.



What does whistleblowing data indicate about sexual harassment reporting?

Interestingly, almost none of the whistleblowing cases reported by councils relate to [sexual harassment](#) according to the Freedom of Information (FOI) responses, even in areas showing the largest increases, reflecting that even though Acas reported a 40% increase, it's not currently reflected in internal whistleblowing figures.

The discrepancy suggests that employees may have historically felt that whistleblowing was not the right avenue for raising harassment concerns due to fear of repercussions, a limited understanding of how these systems operate, or the perception that harassment should be reported through other internal mechanisms.

With the [Employment Rights Act](#) expanding protections for whistleblowers, more workers may now feel empowered to use these channels to report sexual harassment, potentially bridging the gap between rising incidents and formal internal reporting.



"Mismanagement of complaints is often the biggest risk to employers and so management should be trained to spot complaints and get help as soon as possible. Minimising complaints, particularly by advising the employee to sort it out themselves, or approaching the alleged harasser before any proper process is in place, breaching confidentiality by sharing details of the complaint inappropriately and sitting on a complaint because it's uncomfortable, or because the alleged harasser is senior are common mistakes that managers make."

*- Nickie Elenor, employment lawyer
and founder, Guardian Law*

In contrast, councils showing little or no movement, such as Bath & North East Somerset and Wakefield, or those experiencing slight declines, may reflect workplaces where staff feel more comfortable raising day-to-day concerns but remain reluctant to escalate more serious issues. It may also simply indicate a lower volume of whistleblowing incidents overall.

Notably, the fact that reports in these areas tend to centre on non-harassment issues suggests employees feel structurally supported to highlight organisational failings, yet may lack equivalent assurance when it comes to reporting harm they have personally experienced.

Taken together, these patterns underline the need for stronger protections and more transparent reporting pathways - such as those proposed under the Employment Rights Act - to ensure all employees feel safe and supported when speaking up on any [kind of misconduct](#).



How businesses can prepare for the changing employment landscape

1. Strengthen reporting culture before new obligations arrive

With external reports showing harassment rising, and FOI data showing councils aren't capturing it, businesses should focus on creating safer, clearer reporting pathways. This includes simplifying internal policies, compliance training, and reassuring staff that reporting concerns will not lead to retaliation.

Building this culture now will make future compliance far easier once [the Employment Rights Act introduces stricter expectations around workplace safety and misconduct handling.](#)

2. Update policies and processes in anticipation of day-one

The Employment Rights Act is set to expand day-one protections for employees, including sick pay, fair treatment, and handling workplace concerns. Employers should review priority policies such as disciplinary and capability procedures, sickness absence, onboarding materials, and HR procedures to ensure they can meet these standards without disruption.

3. Communicate clearly with employees

Clear, consistent messaging is essential not only for employees but also for managers, who are often the first point of contact for disclosures. Managers effectively act as a gateway to justice, meaning the way they communicate these changes and respond to concerns will play a crucial role in determining whether employees feel safe and supported when speaking up.



4. Invest in proactive people-management practices

As the data shows, employees are more willing to speak up about organisational issues, but still hesitant to report sensitive interpersonal misconduct. Businesses can prepare by introducing preventative measures, regular culture assessments, anonymous feedback channels, using advanced analytics and reporting tools to identify gaps and demonstrate due diligence proactively.

By taking proactive steps now, organisations can treat upcoming employment reforms not as a compliance burden but as an opportunity to strengthen workplace culture, reduce risk, and build a safer, more trustworthy environment where employees feel confident raising concerns.

Speaking to the legal risks employers face, Nickie, warns these can be severe:

"The legal consequences are significant. Poor handling [of complaints] can trigger claims of harassment, detriment or automatic unfair dismissal due to whistleblowing, constructive unfair dismissal, breach of contract and discrimination. Mismanagement could be costly for employers with compensation in harassment cases being uncapped and there is a risk of a significant award of compensation for injury to feelings"



Methodology

Skillcast issued a Freedom of Information request to city and local authorities in the UK and asked:

- How many reports or complaints of sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual conduct has your organisation received in each of the past three calendar years?
- What is your organisation's formal policy for handling reports of sexual harassment?
- Do you classify reports of sexual harassment as “whistleblowing reports” under your current policies?
- Please provide the total number of whistleblowing reports your organisation has received in each of the last three years, and indicate how many of these related specifically to sexual harassment.



Our ERA package

The Employment Rights Act (ERA) introduces some of the most significant reforms to UK employment law in a generation and employers need to act now. From day one rights and uncapped unfair dismissal compensation to extended third-party harassment liability and new whistleblowing protections, the ERA places greater responsibility on organisations to demonstrate proactive compliance.

Our ERA training package equips both employees and managers with the knowledge they need to understand their obligations under the new legislation.

Includes in-depth, refresher, and microlearning courses covering key topics such as preventing sexual harassment, whistleblowing, and the ERA's specific implications for managers. Delivered via the Skillcast Portal or any SCORM-compliant LMS, courses are regularly updated to reflect legislative changes and sit alongside platform tools including policy attestations, incident registers, and anonymous reporting channels.

[Start your trial](#)

[Explore our ERA package](#)

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