



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Jane Hunt MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

**Department for Business, Energy & Industrial
Strategy**
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Website: www.gov.uk

Steve Blatch
Chief Executive - North Norfolk District Council
Holt Road
Cromer
Norfolk NR27 9EN

Our ref: MCB2022/15723

26 August 2022

Email only.

Dear Mr Blatch,

Thank you for your letter dated 5 May 2022 to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, about the whistleblowing regime and, specifically, the length of time external bodies take to investigate disclosures. Your correspondence has been passed to this department and I am replying as this matter falls within my ministerial portfolio. I sincerely apologise for the delay in response, your email has only recently been brought to my attention.

The Government recognises how valuable it is that whistleblowers are prepared to shine a light on wrongdoing and believes that they should be able to do so without fear of recriminations. The Employment Rights Act 1996, amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act, gives legal protection to those who speak up in the public interest. The legislation is intended to build openness and trust in workplaces by ensuring that workers who hold their employers to account are treated fairly.

Regarding the duty to report on whistleblowing disclosures, the Government introduced a legislative requirement in 2017 for all prescribed persons to produce an annual report on whistleblowing disclosures made to them by workers unless exempt. The duty increases confidence that prescribed persons are taking whistleblowing disclosures seriously through greater transparency about how disclosures are handled, in particular that they investigate where appropriate and take action where necessary. The reporting duty will also improve consistency across different bodies in the way they respond to disclosures.

The Government believes that availability of clear information on who a worker can report wrongdoing to and guidance on how whistleblowing works in practice will give more employees the confidence to come forward. Employers will also benefit from knowing what to do when an employee makes a disclosure. Comprehensive guidance is available to assist employers and prescribed persons in handling disclosures. Further information is available at:

- www.gov.uk/whistleblowing.
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/whistleblowing-guidance-and-code-of-practice-for-employers.
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/whistleblowing-guidance-for-prescribed-persons.

While I fully appreciate the Council's concerns, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the performance of the external auditor. I note that Ernst & Young (EY) was appointed to perform the Council's audit by Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA). If a Council has opted in to PSAA's audit procurement and believes they have an issue against their auditor,

they can raise a complaint directly with PSAA. Further information about PSAA's complaints policy and procedure can be found on their website: www.psaa.co.uk/contact-us/complaints.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write, I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane', written in a cursive style.

JANE HUNT MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Labour Markets