

2026 KEY LAW CHANGES FOR UK IN-HOUSE LEGAL COUNSEL

The legal landscape for UK in-house teams is evolving rapidly in 2026, with ongoing reforms shaping business obligations. This factsheet outlines key legal developments and practical takeaways.

EMPLOYMENT



The *Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA)* introduces major changes to UK employment law. The government is rolling out these reforms in phases during 2026 to 2027. Some changes are already in force, including several industrial action reforms that began in **February 2026**.

Key changes from April 2026 include:

- statutory sick pay applies from day one, with no minimum earnings threshold;
- paternity and unpaid parental leave are available from day one;
- new unpaid bereaved partner's paternity leave is introduced.
- employers must keep detailed annual leave and holiday pay records;
- protective award for redundancy consultation failures increases to 180 days' pay;
- whistleblowing protections now cover sexual harassment disclosures; and
- a new Fair Work Agency has been established as a single enforcement body.

Key changes from October 2026 include:

- employers must prevent sexual harassment;
- tribunal claim deadlines increase to six months; and
- employers must inform workers of their right to join a trade union.

Changes expected in 2027 include:

- unfair dismissal rights apply after six months, with no cap; and
- dismiss and rehire on worse terms is usually automatic unfair dismissal.

Key Takeaways: Review employment contracts, policies and practices to ensure compliance and actively plan for increased costs and legal risk.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE



The *Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 (ECCTA)* introduces phased reforms to strengthen the UK's response to economic crime and improve the accuracy of Companies House data.

The government is rolling out these changes gradually, with several key measures already in force, including identity verification requirements that began on **18 November 2025**.

Key changes include:

- directors, PSCs and LLP members must complete mandatory identity verification;
- the law introduces Authorised Corporate Service Providers to assist with verification;
- companies no longer need to keep most statutory registers, except the members' register;
- companies must ensure filings are accurate and timely or risk criminal liability; and
- since 1 September 2025, large organisations commit a 'failure to prevent fraud' offence unless they have reasonable prevention procedures, with potential unlimited fines.

Key Takeaways: Ensure relevant stakeholders understand the changes and complete identity verification on time. Keep filings accurate and up to date to minimise risk.

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CONSUMER PROTECTIONS



In 2025, the *Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (DMCCA)* introduced major changes to the UK consumer protection regime. It bans unfair commercial practices and establishes a new enforcement framework, adding stricter rules for consumer-facing businesses. Key provisions took effect on **6 April 2025**.

Although not new in 2026, it is worth noting:

- enforcement of consumer protections is increasing; and
- the law will tighten subscription contract rules, introducing strict notice requirements, annual cooling-off rights and price transparency (expected Spring 2027).

Key Takeaways: If your business is consumer-facing, ensure your practices, terms and purchase journeys comply with the new rules.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY



The UK Intellectual Property Office has significantly increased the fees payable for intellectual property rights, including trade marks, registered designs and patents, from **1 April 2026**.

Key changes include:

- fees have increased by around 25% on average, as set out in new guidance; and
- higher fees apply to applications, renewals and actions (e.g. online renewals and invalidation proceedings).

Key Takeaways: Businesses should review and budget for higher UK IP filing, renewal and enforcement costs, as protecting and maintaining IP rights is now materially more expensive.

DATA PROTECTION AND E-PRIVACY



The *Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 (DUA Act)* introduces targeted updates to UK data protection and e-privacy laws. It amends, rather than replaces, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (**GDPR**), *Data Protection Act 2018*, and Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (**PECR**) (covering cookies and direct marketing).

The government is introducing the changes in stages, with many key provisions taking effect on **5 February 2026**.

Key changes include:

- regulators can now issue higher PECR fines (up to £17.5m or 4% of global turnover);
- automated decision-making rules are relaxed in some cases, provided safeguards are in place;
- 'Legitimate interests' is clarified via 'Recognised Legitimate Interests', removing the need for a balancing test in those cases;
- from **19 June 2026**, controllers must implement formal complaints-handling processes; and
- certain low-risk cookies (e.g. functional and analytics) may be used without consent, subject to conditions.

Key Takeaways: Review how the DUA Act impacts your use of personal data and update policies, processes and compliance practices as needed.

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