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Whistleblowers should be paid for their help, says serious fraud director

Seven hundred UK nationals reportedly whistle-blow in the US because they ‘feel like they can’t do it here’

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The new director of the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) has said he wants to pay whistleblowers who help with investigations.

Nick Ephgrave, who took over the post at the end of last year, said that unlike the US, Britain seemed reluctant to pay those who spoke out.

He made the comments in his first speech in the role and said the SFO had to speed up the time it took to investigate cases.

Speaking at the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall on Tuesday evening, he said: “I think we should pay whistleblowers.”

“If you look at the example of the United States of America, their system allows that, and I think 86 per cent of the \$2.2 billion (£1.7 million) in civil settlements and judgments recovered by the US Department of Justice were based on whistleblower information.

“Since 2012, 700 UK nationals have gone to America to whistle-blow because they feel they can’t do it here because there isn’t that incentivisation.”

‘Just isn’t British’

Mr Ephgrave’s comments are in contrast to remarks made by some of his predecessors.

David Green, who was head of the agency from 2012 to 2018, argued moral responsibility should encourage people to come forward and said paying for such information “just isn’t British”.

Last year, the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) paid out its largest-ever award to a whistleblower, almost \$279 million.

Established in 2010, the SEC’s whistleblower office is designed to encourage people with information about financial misconduct to help the agency bring cases.

To get paid, whistleblowers must provide information that leads to an SEC enforcement case of more than \$1 million.

Whistleblowers can be paid between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of the total of the fines collected.

Mr Ephgrave, former chief constable of Surrey police, said that UK investigators had to think about how difficult it was to be a whistleblower.

He added: “You might be a senior person in an organisation with a mortgage, kids, and yet you are uncomfortable about what’s going on.

“You have a really difficult choice then. Do you blow the whistle and risk never working again – you might have to sell the house – or do you just button up?”

“If you are a genuine whistleblower and you know that if you do speak out there is a chance that actually there will be some compensation so financially you will be secure, that gives a bit more of an incentive.

“It is all very well saying ‘they should do the right thing’ but there are all sorts of other things to consider.

“It is not easy to do this, even if it is morally the right thing.”

In addition to his role with Surrey police, Mr Ephgrave previously served as assistant commissioner of the metropolitan police service.

During his speech he said that incentivising whistleblowers would drastically help speed up the time it took for the SFO to investigate cases.

He added: “If we are serious about SFO cases being quicker, then we need to focus on intelligence, and the information that we gather at the outset.”

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