

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE FRAUD TEAM - WORK PLAN 2015/17

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) aims to set and achieve the highest standards of service provision in all of its services. This is underpinned by the strategic objective in the Corporate Plan to:
- Ensure we are a customer focused and service led Council - we want to continue to deliver value for money services.
- 1.2 HDC is committed to actively safeguard public funds by preventing and detecting fraud and corruption. Maintaining high levels of probity, governance and ethics will ensure that HDC's resources can be focussed in providing services that matter to local residents.
- 1.3 HDC's commitment to dealing with fraud and error is demonstrated by having in place systems, resources and procedures designed to:
- limit the opportunities to commit fraudulent acts
 - enable such acts to be detected at the first opportunity
 - deal with investigations promptly, thoroughly, professionally and legally.
 - where appropriate use and publicise its sanction activity as a deterrent to future offending.
 - reduce the financial loss caused by fraudulent activity
- 1.4 To enable this, HDC retains a professional, fully trained Corporate Fraud Team (CFT). The work of this team is directly aligned to meet the priorities set out in the HDC's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy approved by Members in June 2015.

2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Fraud Team was originally established to combat benefit fraud but over recent years the remit of the Team has expanded considerably. The work of the Team has included investigations into all areas of services provided by HDC but in particular around Local Taxation and Housing but also matters relating to Employees, Elections, Planning and Environmental Health.
- 2.2 With the creation of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) by the Government, all welfare benefit fraud, including Housing Benefit is now investigated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

- 2.3 From May 2015, with the transfer of three Investigating Officers to the DWP, the size and focus of the team has inevitably changed. It is important that a smaller team concentrates on preventing and investigating fraud that presents the highest risk to HDC. The retention of the CFT is against a national trend which has shown that nationally, less than half (45.7%) of councils have a corporate counter fraud team tackling non- benefit fraud. In London, 93.5 per cent of councils have a corporate fraud team. By comparison just 37.4 per cent of councils in the rest of the country have a corporate fraud team.
- 2.4 HDC was the lead authority for all of the Cambridgeshire Districts and a number of other partners in securing funding from DCLG to establish the Cambridgeshire Anti-Fraud Network (CAFN). The principle aim of the partnership has been the creation of a central data-sharing hub across Cambridgeshire to assist in the detection and investigation of tenancy fraud and other fraud identified/reported across the County.
- 2.5 Following the abolition of the Audit Commission in March 2015, The European Institute for Combatting Corruption and Fraud (TEICCAF) was formed to continue the counter-fraud work of the Audit Commission in supporting local authorities dealing with fraud and sharing information on trends in fraud detection, the dissemination of good practice and identifying current and emerging risk. *Protecting the English Public Purse 2015* was published earlier this year and has helped to form the focus of the CFT into the future, along with HDC's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

3. WORK PRIORITIES FOR 2015/17

- 3.1 The team's substantive structure is currently:
- 1 Team Leader (TL)
 - 1 Investigating Officer (IO)
 - 1 Fraud Intelligence and Analyst Officer (AO)
- 3.2 Sifting of referrals: The AO will sift all reported fraud in line with current procedures and select those cases suitable for full investigation and those which can be dealt with in other ways. The sift will include an assessment of potential loss with those cases highlighted as producing larger or more immediate savings being prioritised.
- 3.3 Investigations: The IO will undertake investigations into all cases selected for full investigation.
- 3.4 Management: The TL will work to develop the CAFN project and continue working with partners to identify services at risk of fraud. The TL oversees all investigations, prepare files for disposal in line with the Fraud Prosecution Policy and produces reports for senior officers and Members.

3.5 The work priorities identified by the team are currently:

- Council Tax Discount Fraud
- Council Tax Support Fraud
- Housing Tenancy Fraud – subletting/register/rent deposit applications
- Business Rates
- Housing Benefit Matching Service referrals – initial sift and checks but this will change as new risks are identified.

Targets:

Council Tax Discount Fraud	15 penalties per annum 4 prosecutions per annum
Council Tax Support Fraud	5 penalties per annum
Housing Tenancy Fraud	8 properties recovered per annum

(These targets will be reviewed as the team becomes more established and works with other service areas.)

- 3.6 In addition, although the CFT no longer investigates Housing Benefit fraud, it has taken on the role of Single Point of Contact (SPoC) for dealing with enquiries received from the DWP in relation to Housing Benefit investigations in line with the requirements and deadlines set by the DWP.
- 3.7 The CFT is often called upon to provide expertise and mentoring for other enforcement services in collection of evidence and interview facilities. The CFT offers a wide variety of services including credit reference data, local intelligence, checking for previous convictions or even hands on interview specialism to other sections within the Council.
- 3.8 A number of new and emerging frauds have been identified by TEICCAF, some of which may affect HDC. These include Right To Buy (RTB) and No Recourse to Public Funds.
- 3.9 Proposed changes to legislation could mean that Housing Associations will become increasingly at risk from RTB fraud. In order to combat this, the CFT is working with Housing Association partners to establish whether their procedures for processing RTB applications are robust and how the CFT can help ensure that only genuine applications are accepted.
- 3.10 For securing the gateway to ensure that HDC services are only provided to people legitimately entitled to receive them, the CFT has purchased scanners that can identify whether documents such as passports, visas and driving licences are genuine.

3.11 The CFT will work with the HDC Audit Section and partners to determine whether there is a risk to HDC and take appropriate action.

4. PUBLICITY

4.1 The CFT encourages allegations of fraud to be reported to HDC through the following:

- a 24-hour telephone line (automated voicemail system) that is checked daily
- a further phone line manned during office hours
- an e-mail account linked directly to the CFT
- on-line referral forms on the HDC website
- Cambridgeshire Tenancy Fraud Forum/CAFN website with on-line referral forms
- at any of the Council's offices or in writing

4.2 Prosecutions are regularly publicised in the local press as both a deterrent to prospective fraudsters and as a way of encouraging further referrals.