



Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Audit Committee

September 2024

Anti-Fraud Progress Report 2024/2025

Purpose

1. This early report provides details of the work undertaken by the Shared Anti-Fraud Service and Council Officers to protect the Council against the threat of fraud and the delivery of the Council's Anti-Fraud Action Plan for 2024/25.
2. Further reports will be provided to this Committee in 2024/25 with detailed progress with delivery of the agreed Plan and SAFS KPI performance.

Recommendations

3. Members are RECOMMENDED to:

- a) **Note the progress by officers and the Shared Anti-Fraud Service to deliver the Anti-Fraud Plan for the Council.**

Delivery of the Anti-Fraud Plan

4. The 2024/2025 Anti-Fraud Plan was approved by this Committee at its March 2024 meeting ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Audit Committee, 18/03/2024 19:30 \(welhat.gov.uk\)](#). This Plan covers all areas recommended by CIPFA and the *Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy for the 2020s*. The Plan also provides assurance that the council continues to benefit from a positive return on its investment in the SAFS Partnership.

2024/2025 Anti-Fraud Activity

5. The Council has in place Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policies and these are kept under constant review to ensure compliance with current best practice and the impact of any changes required by legislation.
6. SAFS provided alerts on new and emerging fraud trends through its Board members and directly with officers working in our Partners. These alerts come from a variety of sources including the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN), Credit Industry Fraud Avoidance Service (CIFAS), National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) at the City of London Police, and others.
7. Between April and August this year SFAS issued 20 Urgent Alerts including impersonation/ push payments/ payment diversion/ false identified used in various application frauds. SAFS also provide regular Fraud Threat Reports that summarise new and emerging risks and provide officers on guidance around the identification of these and prevention. SAFS issued two such reports so far this year focused on Multiple Employment, ID fraud, Overpayment fraud, and MS Account Take-Over.
8. A training plan to build on staff awareness and fraud reporting, along with a publicity campaign to inform the public and encourage fraud reporting has been developed with officers in HR and Comms teams. Eight specialised training events (including ID fraud, Independent Living, BB abuse) and two all officer SAFS/fraud awareness sessions have already been delivered, and we have further sessions planned for September on contract/bid-rigging & housing fraud.

9. Between April and end of August, a further 40 allegations of fraud have been received by the Council/SAFS including Housing, Council Tax and Blue Badge abuse. Referrals from staff have increased from last year, which indicates our recent awareness sessions have had a positive effect. SAFS currently have 44 cases under investigation, or at referral (21) stage, with estimated losses of £923k.
10. Five investigations have been closed and fraud losses/savings identified in two cases- with fraud in excess of £95k actually reported across all cases. SAFS have also conducted 11 reviews of low value council tax frauds identifying reporting £18k fraud in the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
11. SAFS and Council officers are currently preparing to take part in the main National Fraud Initiative (NFI) exercise for 2024/25. The Cabinet Office are providing guidance on data specification and timescales for data uploads in October with the output from this expected in January 2024.
12. The Council is signed up to the Herts FraudHub for 24/25. The FraudHub this works in a similar fashion to the main NFI exercise with data being submitted along with the other 7 partners in the SAFS Partnership for review to help identify fraud. In Q1 all agreed datasets were successfully uploaded and some data is already submitted for Q2. So far this has identified 1.7k records for review, SAFS and Council officers are reviewing these at present, with a small number of frauds/discrepancies already identified.
13. SAFS continues to focus a large part of its work for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council on allegations of 'tenancy-fraud' committed against the Council's housing stock. Currently 16 of our live cases involve some aspect of tenancy fraud, 1 property secured in Q1 and several properties pending action to recover with housing management or legal services. SAFS also reviewed 15 Right to Buy applications to prevent money laundering or fraud in this process, one such review identified a potential fraud and was escalated for further enquiries.
14. SAFS manages the 'Council Tax Review' framework for all borough/district councils enabling them to identify fraudulent applications for council tax discounts. The new contract has been delivered by SAFS working with all district/boroughs and is now live with Welwyn Hatfield Council planning to make use of the framework in 2024 through its shared Revenues and Benefit Service.
15. In June SAFS worked with Anti-Fraud teams at Councils across Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire to provide a campaign to tackle the twin problem of Blue Badge theft and the misuse of stolen badges in car parks owned by Councils. In Hertfordshire SAFS also engaged with the Hertfordshire Constabulary and joint patrols with SAFS, Police and Council CEOs officers taking part, were conducted through June targeting known hot spots.
16. SAFS KPIs were agreed in the Anti-Fraud Pan, progress is reported below.

SAFS KPIs - 2024/ 2025- (WHBC)

KPI	Measure	Objectives	Performance to August 2024
1	Return on investment from SAFS Partnership.	<p>A. Meetings to take place with the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation), quarterly. And reports on all SAFS Activity to Portfolio Leads for Finance and Housing.</p> <p>B. Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) or deputy will be invited to attend SAFS Board meetings quarterly.</p> <p>C. Regular meetings to take place with Directors/Service Leads to agree and update local work plans.</p> <p>D. 3 Reports to Audit Committee in 2024/25.</p>	<p>A. Meetings take place with the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) and other senior leaders to discuss delivery of the AF Plan and anything else relevant. The Agenda is agreed by Council Officers</p> <p>B. Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) is a member of the SAFS Board and attends its quarterly meetings.</p> <p>C. SAFS meet with other service leads across the Council as and when required with a focus on the highest risk areas.</p> <p>D. 5 reports in all will be delivered in 24/25 at the June/September/January AC meetings.</p>
2	Provide an investigation service.	A. Deliver between 90% and 110% of the 344 Days of counter fraud work including proactive and reactive investigation activity, data-analytics, training and fraud risk management.	A. To the end of July 2024 SAFS had provided 143 days (43%) of those planned for the year.
3	Action on reported fraud.	A. SAFS response to 95% of referrals received within 2 Days . (Trial Q1)	A. In Q1 SAFS responded to 100% of referrals within 24 hours on average. (We are reviewing performance against the 95% target at present)
4	Anti-Fraud Training	A. Deliver 10 anti-fraud/corruption training events for staff/Members in year. (To be agreed with Directors/ Service leads and HR)	A. 8 Sessions delivered in Q1/Q2, with 2 more planned for Q2. In addition SAFS presented at the Councils Staff Briefing events in Q1 with all staff invited.
5	Allegations of fraud. & And outcomes from cases investigated.	<p>A. 100% All reported fraud (referrals) received by the Council will be logged and reported by type & source on SAFS CMS. Outcomes of all referrals/cases will be recorded and reported.</p> <p>B. 6-12 Social homes secured from unlawful use or sub-letting or other unlawful activity.</p> <p>C. 100% Review of all Right to Buy and 'Succession' applications to prevent fraud and money laundering.</p> <p>D. SAFS to provide all Fraud Data for 2023/24 as required by the Transparency Code 2015.</p>	<p>A. Fraud reporting options available for staff and residents on the Council's webpage and intranet- This is linked to SAFS reporting tools. All cases with reports/values/outcomes recorded on SAFS CMS.</p> <p>B. 1 property recovered in Q1 with several pending recovery at the time of reporting.</p> <p>C. 100% review of all RTBs completed, no Succession applications have been submitted to SAFS.</p> <p>D. Transparency Data provided in SAFS report to AC in June 2024.</p>
6	Making better use of data to prevent/identify fraud.	<p>A. Support the output from NFI 2024/25 Council services.</p> <p>B. Membership and VFM from the Herts FraudHub in 2024/25.</p>	<p>A. The NFI data-upload is planned for October with plans to review output from January 2025.</p> <p>B. The Council has a contract in place for the FHub and data is being uploaded and</p>

Further Reading

17. List of Background Papers - Local Government Act 1972, Section 100D

- (a) **Councillors Workbook on Bribery & Fraud Prevention** (LGA 2017)
- (b) **Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally- A Strategy for the 2020's** (CIPFA/CIFAS/LGA 2020)
- (c) **Tackling Fraud in the Public Sector** (CIPFA 2020)
- (d) **Lost Homes Lost Hope** (Fraud Advisory Panel 2023)