



Stevenage Borough Council

Audit Committee

2024/25 Anti-Fraud Plan

Purpose

- 1 This report provides members with details of the Councils Anti-Fraud Plan for 2024/25.

Recommendations

- 2 **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - I. **Review and approve the Anti-Fraud Plan for 2024/25.**

Background

- 3 Recent reports have been provided to officers and are being used by SAFS to ensure that the Council is aware of its fraud risks and finds ways to mitigate or manage these effectively wherever possible.

These reports include:

Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally a Strategy for the 2020's. This document replaces the previous 2016-2019 Strategy on which all current Anti-Fraud Plans are based however, much of the format/themes/content of the previous document are retained with key changes being around the governance and 'ownership' of anti-fraud and corruption arrangements.

The Public Sector Fraud Authority 2022/23: Building for Success. The government has created the Public Sector Fraud Authority to transform the way that the government manages fraud. The PSFA works with departments and public bodies to better understand and reduce the impact of public sector fraud.

UK Fraud Strategy 'Stopping Scams and Protecting the Public. The Government launched its latest strategy in 2023 aimed at bringing government and the private sector together to tackle fraud, the pursuit and punishment of fraudsters, providing more recognition of fraud and how to avoid it.

Lost Homes, Lost Hope. This paper, published by the Fraud Advisory Panel & Tenancy Fraud Forum in April 2023 uses previous data and research to estimate the current cost to local government of tenancy fraud along with the volume of fraud across the sector. The SAFS Partners have adopted the value of fraud loss used in this academic piece when reporting 'tenancy fraud'.

- 4 According to reports from CIPFA, National Audit Office (NAO), Cabinet Office, and the Private Sector, fraud risk across local government in England continue to increase and more needs to be done to protect the public purse.
- 5 The Cabinet Office, Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government, National Audit Office, and CIPFA have issued advice, and best practice guidance, to support local councils in the fight to reduce the risk of fraud and prevent loss to the public purse. This advice includes the need for vigilance in recognising fraud risks and the investment of sufficient resources in counter fraud activities.

- 6 It is essential that the Council has in place a robust framework to prevent and deter fraud, including effective strategies and policies, as well as plans to deal with the investigation and prosecution of identified fraud.
- 7 Stevenage Borough Council is a founding member of the Hertfordshire Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS). This Committee has previously received detailed reports about the creation of SAFS, and how this service works closely with the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS). SAFS works across the whole Council dealing with many aspects of fraud, from deterrence & prevention to investigation & prosecution.

Report

Anti-Fraud Plan 2024/25

- 8 The reports and papers mentioned at section 3 above and guidance from National Audit Office (NAO) and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) recommend that organisations have effective and robust counter fraud and corruption measures. These measures require the acknowledgement of fraud and corruption as a tangible risk, policies and procedures to deter and prevent fraud and resources to investigate fraud and recover losses. Above all an organisation should have a plan outlining how it will protect itself against fraud and corruption.
- 9 Council officers and SAFS management develop and agree an **Anti-Fraud Plan** each year and the proposed plan for 2024/25 is presented at **Appendix A**.

The Plan and Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally

- 10 The Anti-Fraud Plan has been designed to meet the recommendations of the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy (FFCL) by adopting the five 'pillars' of Protect, Govern, Acknowledge, Prevent and Pursue. The plan identifies officers and members who are charged with delivering it.
- 11 The plan identifies officers/members who will have a role in delivering it and SAFS will work with all concerned to ensure they fully understand their role in delivering the Plan and supporting the FFCL strategy.
- 12 Members will note in the Plan that this Committee has a role in ensuring that the Council meets its objectives.
- 13 The Plan includes KPIs for SAFS that will be monitored across the year.

Counter Fraud Funding and Resources 2024/25

- 14 At pages 4 – 7 of the main body of the Plan (**Appendix A**) details are provided of all funding on counter fraud in 2024/25 and how this will be divided across service areas.

- 15 We have worked closely with those service areas where we perceive the highest risk of fraud to be and agreed projects and work-pans that reflect the specific fraud risks raised by senior managers in those areas and SAFS management.
- 16 Page 8/ schedule B of the Plan references SAFS KPIs and the Standards of Service agreed with Council officers.
- 17 SAFS will maintain its relationship with third party specialist providers and national networks to keep the Council informed of new and emerging fraud threats or changes to best practice that assist in deterring/preventing fraud and corruption.
- 18 SAFS will continue to work closely with Council officers working in those services mentioned in the Plan.

Appendices

- 19 The following appendices are attached to this report:-

Appendix A – Stevenage Borough Council Anti-Fraud Plan 2024/25.

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/CIF9AS/LGA 2020)***
- (c) ***Tackling Fraud in the Public Sector (CIPFA 2020)***
- (d) ***Code of Practice - Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (CIPFA 2014)***
- (e) ***Fighting Fraud - Breaking the Chain (Report of Session 2022-2023 House of Lords)***
- (f) ***HMG Fraud Strategy - Stopping Scams, Protecting the Public (May 2023)***
- (g) ***Lost Homes, Lost Hope (Fraud Advisory Panel 2023)***