

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Finance & Resources Service

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Counter Fraud & Investigation Team

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Appendix 1 – Counter Fraud Work Plan 2021/22

KEY:

Denotes proactive initiatives
Denotes prevention / protection initiatives
Denotes development activities

Area	Activity	Target date	Current status	Resource requirement (officers)	Responsible officer	Completed date
Counter fraud	Maintain business as usual through management of the caseload, timely investigation of referrals towards a prompt, efficient and fair resolution, proactive fraud detection initiatives and the provision of advice and training to the wider council.	Ongoing	Business as usual is being maintained, the team is at its full complement and the backlog of cases is in remission.	5	Shaun DUTTON	ONGOING
Business Rates	Pro-active audit of empty commercial premises.	TBD	Visits have now been undertaken to properties recorded as empty, with follow up work now in progress.	5	Shaun DUTTON	07/04/2022
Council Tax	Joint working agreement with DWP for cases involving the Council Tax Reduction scheme.	TBD	Information provided by the DWP suggests that their fraud investigation capability is not engaging at a local level. This makes a local joint working agreement impossible and	2	Shaun DUTTON Caroline MERCIECA	ON HOLD



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Area	Activity	Target date	Current status	Resource requirement (officers)	Responsible officer	Completed date
			therefore this activity is on hold pending resumption of local DWP investigations. This situation will be monitored. The lack of DWP engagement with local authorities is a subject of national concern and is being addressed through the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally group.			
Council wide	Internal publicity campaign to highlight the work and reporting mechanisms of the fraud team.	Ongoing	Avenues to increase the team's profile across the Council continue to be explored. The monthly fraud newsletter's audience is expanding and now reaches approximately 700 recipients.	1	Shaun DUTTON	ONGOING
		October 2021	Programme of publicity and talks to raise staff awareness of the Whistleblowing procedures and how to report concerns.	2	Shaun Dutton	15/10/2021
		October 2021	Publicity campaign to highlight International Fraud Awareness Week.	1	Shaun DUTTON	15/10/2021

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Housing	Pro-active audit of SBC tenancies.	June 2021 October 2021 March 2022	The first exercise has been completed with some success. A list of tenancies from South Essex Homes was provided in December and a further exercise undertaken in January 2022. Two out of three planned exercises undertaken in the year.	5	Shaun DUTTON James COUSEN	26/06/2021 NOT ACHIEVED 28/01/2022
Housing	Review of SBC tenancy terms and conditions to strengthen the counter fraud message and encourage cooperation with the counter fraud team.	TBD	The South Essex Homes' tenancy T&Cs are due to be reviewed. South Essex Homes are aware that we wish to contribute. We are waiting for information as to when this review will take place.	1	Shaun DUTTON	NOT ACHIEVED
Council wide	Fraud risk and process analysis of areas of the Council's business at high risk of fraud: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement • Housing • Housing applications • School admissions • Blue badge applications • Council Tax • Business Rates • Online services • Social Care Direct payments • Recruitment • Others dependent upon current research 	Start July 2021	This work will now be performed alongside Internal Audit's programme of work with risk assessment findings incorporated into their reports. This has the effects of adding more weight to any recommendations made and contributing to a closer working relationship between the two teams. CFIT continue to issue specific post-investigation reports recommending process / policy improvements	2-5	Shaun DUTTON	ONGOING

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	Policy review, process improvement recommendations where appropriate, service-specific training to be delivered where required.		that would provide a greater protection from fraud where appropriate.			
Blue Badge	Review of the process on how Blue Badge fraud is dealt with and training for APCOA staff. Pro-active Blue Badge fraud exercise, possibly a joint exercise with APCOA and Essex Police.	August 2021 December 2021 March 2022 2022	The joint exercise with APCOA has been completed with no frauds detected. However, this was a high-profile exercise that received strong support from the community. The methodology of the exercise will be revised and a further exercise will be conducted later in the year. Counter Fraud officers have now been granted powers to inspect and retain Blue Badges. Warrant cards are currently being produced and a second proactive exercise will be conducted once these are available. Permission has been granted to deliver Blue Badge refresher training to APCOA CEOs and this is in production.	5	Shaun DUTTON Paul BROADBENT	20/08/2021 06/12/2021 NOT ACHIEVED DUE TO THE EMPTY NNDR PREMISES AUDIT
Housing	Postal information campaign to targeted tenancy areas to encourage reporting of concerns about fraud.	August/September 2021	This has been delivered through SEH's magazine to all tenants in the form of an open letter.	2	Shaun DUTTON James COUSEN	October 2021

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Benefits	Contribute to the amendment of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) policy to ensure that the team is empowered to investigate CTRS fraud without a dependence on the DWP.	Summer 2021	Awaiting confirmation of when the policy is due for review. This policy was reviewed in the Summer of 2021 without CFIT's involvement. We are currently trialling an approach with SCC Benefits that will avoid policy amendment.	1	Shaun DUTTON	07/02/2022
Business Rates	Research project to determine best practice and effective methods of combatting Business Rates fraud. Establish a working group between CFIT, Trading Standards, Business Rates and Legal Services to review the Council's capabilities and determine realistic opportunities for prevention, detection and action against offenders.	November 2021	This project is waiting to be assigned. A meeting was held between interested parties and CFIT is now developing a protocol designed to disrupt pop-up shops in the High Street from evading NNDR and to limit their operational window.	2	TBD Shaun DUTTON	NOT ACHIEVED 02/03/2022
Counter fraud	Explore joint working opportunities with other SBC teams, particularly parking, Regulatory Services and Trading Standards. Explore the possibility of information/intelligence sharing hub.	Ongoing	The team is now a participant in the Strategic Tasking Allocation Group which affords these opportunities and meets this task. CFIT now has information sharing agreements with 17 teams across the Council and a closer working arrangement with Trading Standards.	1	Paul BROADBENT	02/06/2021
Counter fraud	Develop a financial investigator capability.	2022	Funding has now been agreed to train two officers in Financial Investigation.	3	Shaun DUTTON Caroline MERCIECA David GILL	24/03/2022

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	Develop a financial intelligence officer capability.		One officer has now completed the Financial Investigator Course. This has been superseded by the ambition to have two officers trained as financial investigators.	2		
Specific teams	Training in specific counter fraud techniques to be delivered to identified teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> False document identification Spotting the signs of subletting Others as identified through risk analysis activities (see below)	March 2022	An update on spotting the signs of subletting has been delivered to South Essex Homes' officers.	2	Shaun DUTTON	23/06/2021
		2022	A session on false document identification is being written.		David GILL	
Various	Investigate the use of technology and data matching to identify and target the risks of fraud against the Council. Develop targeted proactive exercises to act on the results.	March 2022	This is aspirational and dependent upon a variety of factors such as information sharing agreements, the availability, cost and complexity of tools required to do this, staff training etc. Enquiries into the feasibility of this will be conducted as and when workload commitments allow. A meeting has been planned with a potential supplier of internet data mining services. A data matching exercise is being planned to assess the scale of fraud against the Essential Living Fund.	2-4	Shaun DUTTON David GILL	ONGOING POSTPONED August 2021

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			<p>A business case for membership of CIFAS has been prepared. This will allow the Council access to the National Fraud Database and the Enhanced Internal Fraud Database. These enable increased fraud intelligence gathering and risk assessment, enhanced employee and supplier vetting checks, enhanced evidence collection and data matching across live and current data sets from across the public and private sectors.</p> <p>A funding bid has been submitted for CIFAS membership.</p>			ONGOING
Residents	Conduct a programme of presentations to local community groups and residents' associations to highlight the risks of fraud and how to protect self and the council.	Ongoing	These will be on a no more than monthly basis and the first talk has been delivered. Contacts are being collected from interested groups.	1	Shaun DUTTON	ONGOING
Counter fraud	<p>Develop 'income generation' opportunities through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter fraud training initiatives for SBC partners and service providers • An investigation and prosecution service to local Housing Associations • Provision of a Financial Investigation service to other SBC teams and possibly other local authorities. 	TBD	<p>This is aspirational at this time and development will be dependent upon how the team progresses over the coming 12 months.</p> <p>This cannot be explored at the expense of our ongoing workload commitments or pro-active and prevention activities.</p>	TBD	Shaun DUTTON	

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