



East Herts Council
Shared Anti-Fraud Service
Progress Report
23 September 2015

Recommendation

Members are recommended to:

- note the Shared Anti-Fraud Progress Report

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1 Introduction and Background

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with:
- a) the progress made by the new Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) since its launch on 1st April 2015
 - b) progress on a proposed shared fraud strategy
 - c) proposed county wide SAFS publicity campaign
 - d) proposed format of future quarterly reports

Background

- 1.2 East Herts Council was one of the main supporters of the SAFS Project which was established to look at the risks of fraud once the Housing Benefit Fraud functions within the Districts moved to the DWP.
- 1.3 The SAFS Business plan concluded that the district councils in Hertfordshire were at significant risk of non-benefit fraud post SFIS transfer as the staff and funding for them would transfer to the DWP leaving the districts exposed. Areas of fraud highlighted included Council Tax Discount, Blue Badge misuse, Business Rates and Housing. The Business Plan recommended that a Shared Anti-Fraud Team across Hertfordshire Councils would deliver a resilient anti-fraud function for all partners.
- 1.4 In April 2015 East Herts Council along with Broxbourne Council, Hertsmeare Council, North Herts Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council signed an agreement to pilot a Shared Anti-Fraud Service based at the County Council's offices in Stevenage to work alongside the existing Shared Internal Audit Service.
- 1.5 In May 2015 East Herts Councils Housing Benefit Fraud Function transferred to the DWP and since then the Anti-Fraud Function has been provided by SAFS.

2 SAFS Update

Staffing

- 2.1 The SAFS team is composed of nine FTE staff structured as follows

Role	Abbreviation	No. of Posts
Counter Fraud Manager	CFM	1
Counter Fraud Asst Manager	CFAM	1

Counter Fraud Officers	CFO	5
Counter Fraud Assistants	CFA	2

The Team will also receive support from the Head of Assurance, a Business Manager and a Data Analyst.

- 2.2 Recruitment commenced in December 2014 with the CFM being appointed in March 2015 and the last team member joining SAFS in June 2015.
- 2.3 It is the intention that each SAFS Partner receives the dedicated support and response from the Team in a transparent way. At present the most effective way to do this is by allocating one SAFS Team officer to each Partner. This officer will then be the first point of contact for that partner's services and will assist in developing a co-operative relationship with responsibility for building relationships at a service level, delivering training and working on local pilot projects.

Fraud/SAFS Awareness

- 2.4 One of the key elements of a successful service is for SAFS to ensure that fraud can be reported by staff and by the public. All SAFS members have been asked to update their fraud reporting procedures both internal and external. Work is going well with East Herts Council to develop reporting lines and relationships with services including Benefits, Revenues, Housing Needs and Legal Services.
- 2.5 SAFS has its own webpage – www.hertsdirect.org/reportfraud which has an online reporting tool. A hotline has been operational since 1st April (0300 123 4033) and a shared secure email account for reporting fraud – fraud.team@hertscc.gcsx.gov.uk. These contact details have been added to Hertsmere's own website.
- 2.6 In June 2015 SAFS was officially launched at an event in Stevenage attended by senior officers and members from the SAFS partners including East Herts Councils.
- 2.7 Since April SAFS has received the referrals in the table below. These need to be treated with some care at present as there has been a mixed transfer to SFIS and we have yet to meet with many of the service leads within each LA to raise awareness of fraud reporting to SAFS.

SAFS Partner	Hotline	Webpage	Partner	Other
Stevenage	1	2	8	0
Hertsmere	1	1	3	1
East Herts	2	7	0	1
North Herts	1	6	13	4
HCC	1	3	13	15
Broxbourne	0	3	30	-
Other	7	1	1	1
Total	13	23	68	22

Pilot Projects

2.8 SAFS management has made a decision to support pilot projects within the partners and this will be built into future business plans for SAFS. Each of these projects should be limited to a maximum run-time of 1 month to include project planning, delivery and reporting/summary of outcomes. The intention of pilots is to evaluate whether there is a business need for the work and if so how this can be delivered to those Partners who would benefit from it as normal.

Shared Fraud Strategy

2.9 At the SAFS Team meeting on 1.4.2015 it was agreed that SAFS would develop a shared Anti-Fraud Strategy for all partners to review and adopt. This strategy would indicate the high level intention of the SAFS Partners and lay the foundation for further policies to be designed below this and adopted across the County.

2.10 A draft Strategy for this purpose was presented to the SAFS Board on 18.6.2015 and is awaiting approval from all partners. The document will meet each Partners requirements to have in place a Fraud Strategy and can be reviewed annually to ensure that it is fit for purpose and publicised effectively.

Countywide Fraud Awareness Campaign

- 2.11 To raise the profile of SAFS and its role across Hertfordshire it is important that it receives maximum public exposure. This could be delivered through a simple visual campaign using various media but using a single recognisable message.
- 2.12 A media campaign was presented to the SAFS Board on 18.6.2015 for review and comment, and is now being consulted on with respective portfolio holders. If agreed this campaign will be rolled out from September 2015 across the whole county.

Proposed Format of Future Reports

- 2.12 It is proposed that reports to Audit Committee will include the following data relevant to East Herts Council:
- Number of reported frauds
 - Fraud Types
 - Number of cases selected for investigation and reasons for those cases rejected.
 - Outcomes of all cases where an investigation has been concluded.
 - Result of cases where fraud/error established including financial values
 - Number of cases where a fine/penalty/caution/prosecution has resulted.
 - Number of cases where East Herts Council staff have been investigated and the details/outcomes of these.
 - Number of cases where social housing has been recovered and the value of these.
 - Details of a high value/risk/profile cases that are ongoing and specific to Hertsmere council.
 - Specific activity and pilot projects in East Herts Council geographic area and updates on these as they progress.
- 2.13 In line with the partnership agreement, reports to the Audit Committee will be delivered on a twice-yearly basis