



**East Herts Council**

**Audit & Governance Committee**

**February 2026**

**Anti-Fraud Progress Report 2025/2026**

## Purpose

1. This report provides details of the work undertaken by the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) and Council officers to protect the Council against the threat of fraud and the delivery of the Council's Anti-Fraud Plan for 2025/26.
2. A final report covering all anti-fraud work in 2025/26 will be provided to this Committee in the summer of 2026.

## Recommendations

### Members are asked to:

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

## The Anti-Fraud Plan

3. The Anti-Fraud Plan for the current financial year was approved by this Committee at its February 2025 meeting ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Audit and Governance Committee, 18/02/2025 19:00](#) . The 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.

## Anti-Fraud Prevention

4. The Council has in place Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policies and these are kept under review to ensure compliance with current best practice and the impact of any changes required by legislation. These policies are undergoing review by SAFS and Council officers at present with new versions planned for publication by the summer of 2026.
5. SAFS provides 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.
6. Between April and December 2025 SAFS issued 4 Fraud Alerts including a reminder about fake documents, email spoofing, false ID and guidance on the 'Failure to Prevent Fraud' offence. SAFS also provide regular Fraud Threat Reports that summarise new and emerging risks and provide officers with guidance to assist with prevention and reporting. SAFS has issued 25 such reports this year including areas such as multiple employment, housing applications, blue badge misuse, mandate fraud, purchase cards, discretionary payments, grants and council tax liability.
7. A training plan to build on staff awareness and fraud reporting, along with publicity campaigns to inform the public and encourage fraud reporting has been developed

with officers in HR and Comms teams for 2025/26. Nine training sessions have been delivered to the end of December, including one for member of this Committee, with one further session planned for Q4.

8. Across all partners SAFS provides Executive Reports (ER) to senior management and internal audit where investigations identify that fraud or attempted fraud occurred due to system/process weaknesses, SAFS also provides recommendations for management to consider the removal/reduction/mitigation of any ongoing fraud risk. No ERs have been issued this year for East Herts Council.
9. A new offence of 'Failing to Prevent Fraud' introduced by the *Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023* took effect from September this year. SAFS published a briefing paper for senior leadership teams across all SAFS Partners to advise on the impact of this legislation and ensure appropriate action plans are in place. We met with senior management at the Council to discuss the Councils compliance with the Act and the new risks this creates in December 2025, a gap analysis and action plan has been implemented along with the Councils anti-fraud policy review.

### **Reactive Work**

10. Between April and December this year, 95 allegations of fraud had been received affecting service areas such as housing, council tax, and Blue Badge misuse (35 referrals were made by Council officers). At the mid-year, and prior to a large part of the internal training plan being delivered, we had received 50 referrals in total and this reflects the impact of training and awareness for Council staff.
11. SAFS currently have 27 cases under investigation, or at referral stage (14), with estimated losses of **£154K** reported in this caseload. Of 10 investigations closed so far 7 identified fraud with **£56k** in fraud loss identified for recovery, with a further **£34k** loss prevented. Several cases are under investigation from previous years, and these have reported fraud loss/savings combined of **£122k**. SAFS have also conducted compliance reviews of 16 low value cases, identifying **£40k** of additional revenue in council tax.
12. Our work with the Department for Work and Pensions to investigate fraud linked to awards of national benefits such as Universal Credit has identified **£47k** in loss that the DWP are recovering. This work has also resulted in two cases where the DWP and Crown Prosecution Service are considering criminal prosecution which will include charges for fraud committed against the Council for offences related to Council Tax and/or Housing Benefit.
13. SAFS continues to work closely across the Councils Housing services, working with officers to assist in the review of housing and homelessness applications and a number of investigations have been raised since April.

14. SAFS also works with housing providers across the district and one property, that was being illegally sub-let, has been secured and been made available to family from the Councils housing register.

### Proactive Work

15. SAFS and Council officers ensured that all data required for submission as part of the Cabinet Office ‘National Fraud Initiative’ (NFI) was uploaded in late 2024. The output from this exercise produced 843 general matches, creditors and council tax reports. Officers from SAFS and the Council have been reviewing the various reports/matches prioritising high-risk areas, this work has identified 5 potential frauds, with savings through prevention of **£56k** reported so far.
16. The Council is signed up the Herts Fraudhub for 2025/26. The FraudHub works in a similar fashion to the main NFI exercise with data being submitted along with the other SAFS partners to help identify fraud through data-analysis/matching. We had suspended activity on the FH until Q3 to focus on clearing the matches from the main NFI exercise, but 185 matches have been identified for review that are still outstanding.
17. SAFS manages the Hertfordshire County ‘Council Tax Review’ Framework for all borough/district councils across the County enabling each to identify fraud and error in applications for council tax discounts/exemptions. The Councils Shared Revenue and Benefit Service made use of the framework in 2025/26 identifying **£519,785** in additional council tax liability, with 1,064 (approx. 5%) discounts being removed as part of this exercise.
18. The Shared Revenue and Benefit Service, hosted by the Council, also makes use of the AnalyseLocal contract that identifies fraud and error in its Business Rates (NDR) data. This project has identified 24 matters for review by Council officers, and this work is still ongoing at present.
19. SAFS KPIs were agreed in the Anti-Fraud Plan and progress is reported below.

### Key

Met/ Complete		On Target	Part Met	Not Met
KPI	Measure	Objectives		Performance to December 2025
1	Return on investment from SAFS Partnership.	Demonstrate that the Council is receiving a financial return on investment from membership of SAFS and that this equates to its financial contribution. <b>A.</b> Regular meetings to take place with the Councils <b>Head of Strategic Finance and Property</b> at least quarterly or as required by Council officers. <b>B.</b> <b>Head of Strategic Finance and Property</b> will be the SAFS Board representative for the Council and attend its quarterly meetings.		<b>A.</b> Meetings have been planned with the <b>Head of Strategic Finance and Property</b> <b>B.</b> <b>Head of Strategic Finance and Property</b> is a member of the SAFS Board and is invited to its quarterly meetings.  SAFS meet with other service leads across the Council as and when required with a focus on the highest risk areas.

2	Provide an investigation service.	<p>A. <b>Target to deliver at least 95% of the funded 298 Days</b> of counter fraud activity including proactive and reactive investigations, data-analytics, staff training and fraud risk management. (Supported by SAFS Intel/Management).</p> <p>B. <b>3 Reports</b> to Audit and Governance Committee. (Annual Report, Updates, 25/26 AF Plan)</p>	<p>A. To the end of December 2025 SAFS had provided 204 days (<b>68%</b>) of those planned for the year. We are monitoring performance against this KPI in Q4.</p> <p>B. SAFS reports agreed for September/ November / February Committees as part of the Fwd Plan.</p>
3	Action on reported fraud.	A. All cases to be reviewed within <b>2 Days</b> of receipt, on Average.	A. In Q1-Q3 referrals were triaged within 0.6 days on average.
4	Allegations of fraud received. & Success rates for cases investigated.	<p>A. <b>100%</b> of all reported fraud (referrals) will be logged by type &amp; source.</p> <p>B. <b>100%</b> of all cases investigated will be recorded and the financial value, including loss/recovery/ savings of each will be reported to officers.</p>	<p>A. All referrals, from all sources are logged on SAFS CMS.</p> <p>B. All cases investigated are recorded and managed on the SAFS CMS.</p> <p><b>Reports on referrals and investigations including status/source/value/outcomes are available.</b></p>
5	Making better use of data to prevent/identify fraud.	<p>A. Ensure output from NFI 2024/25 is resolved as required by legislation.</p> <p>B. Ensure membership of the Herts FraudHub in 2025/26 and that the ROI from this is reported to Council officers.</p>	<p>A. The NFI reports/matches have been reviewed with SAFS support, and this project is now closed.</p> <p>B. The Council has a contract in place for the FHUB and data is being uploaded and output commenced in Q3.</p>
6	Added value of SAFS membership.	<p>A. Membership of NAFN &amp; PNLD for 2025/26</p> <p>B. <b>5 fraud awareness/prevention sessions</b> for staff/Members in year. (To be agreed with Service leads and HR)</p>	<p>A. The Council is a member of both NAFN and PNLD via SAFS licences. Council officers have access and SAFS provide training/awareness.</p> <p>B. We have delivered 9 training sessions by the end of Q3.</p>

## Further Reading

### 20. 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) *Code of Practice - Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (CIPFA 2014)*
- (d) *Lost Homes, Lost Hope (Fraud Advisory Panel 2023)*
- (e) *Tackling fraud and corruption against government (NAO 2023)*
- (f) *National Fraud Initiative Report 2022 – 2024 (HMG March 2025)*