

ANTI-FRAUD TEAM REPORT 2015/16

Audit Committee - 30 June 2016

Report of Chief Finance Officer

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of Effective Delivery of the Corporate Plan

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Searles

Contact Officer(s) Bami Cole, Ext.7174, Glen Moore Ext. 7471.

Recommendation to Audit Committee:

That Members note the work of the Anti-Fraud Team carried out during the year ended 31 March 2016 and the details of the new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team created on 1 February 2016 following the transfer of benefit fraud work to the Single Fraud Investigation Service (S-FIS) within the Department for Work & Pensions.

Reason for recommendation: The Audit Committee is required to review the work of the Anti-Fraud Team.

Introduction and Background

1. This report sets out details of the activities of the Anti-Fraud Team during 2015/16, including the transfer of all benefit fraud work to the S-FIS in January 2016 and confirms the arrangements for a new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team within Sevenoaks District Council on 1 February 2016.
2. This is the fifth report of the Anti-Fraud Team to the Audit Committee. The Anti-Fraud Team was part of the Audit, Risk and Anti-Fraud shared services working jointly with Dartford Borough Council. The team was responsible for carrying out benefit fraud investigations and assisting both Councils in highlighting instances of fraud which adversely affected the level of taxes/income the Councils collected/received.

Summary of Key Issues in the Report

3. Details of the activities of the team during the year 2015/16 are attached as Appendix A to this report. With effect from 1 February 2016 responsibility for investigating Housing Benefit fraud passed to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Single Fraud Investigation Service. Sevenoaks District Council continues to process and administer claims for Housing Benefit and

therefore retains residual responsibilities in relation to the provision of Housing Benefit information in respect of investigations undertaken by S-FIS and the processing of referrals received from various national anti-fraud initiatives.

4. The Anti-Fraud Team continued to investigate instances of alleged Housing Benefit fraud until the end of 2015 when enquiries were wound down and preparations made for the transfer of all live investigations to the Single Fraud Investigation Service.
5. A key highlight for the year is the successful transfer of all benefit fraud work to the Single Fraud Investigation Service in January 2016 and the creation of a new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team based in the shared service Revenues & Benefits Department which will assist in creating a robust fraud and error compliance strategy protecting the Council's Local Taxation income base.

Key Implications

Financial

6. The cost of the new team has been met from the budget of the old fraud team and from funding from the major preceptors. Although it is anticipated that the team will generate additional council tax and business rates income, a large proportion of this additional income will be passed to the major preceptors. As the income cannot be guaranteed or predicted with any certainty, it has not been built into the budget.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

7. The Council is required to have effective anti-fraud arrangements in place in order to safeguard public funds and prevent the pursuance of crime. The new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team will contribute towards the council's fraud prevention initiatives.

Equality Assessment

8. The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users

Conclusions

9. This report sets out the achievements of a successful year for the Anti-Fraud Team during 2015/16 and outlines details of a new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team. Members are requested to note the report and the details of the new Counter Fraud & Compliance Team.

Appendices

Appendix A - Anti-Fraud Team End of Year Report
2015/16.

Background Papers: None.

Adrian Rowbotham
Chief Finance Officer