

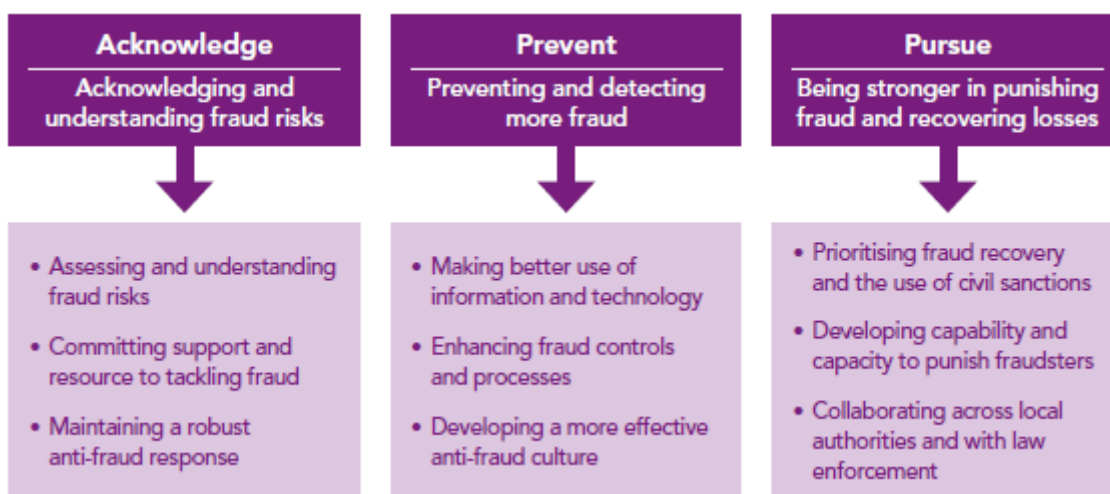
Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Procedure

Policy Statement

The City of Wolverhampton Council is committed to creating and maintaining an environment where fraud, corruption and bribery will not be tolerated. The Council operates a zero tolerance on fraud, corruption and bribery whereby all instances will be investigated and the perpetrator(s) will be dealt with in accordance with established policies. Action will be taken to recover all monies stolen from the Council. Where appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure that such cases receive maximum publicity to deter potential fraudsters.

Links to the Council's corporate plan themes and aims

One of the Council's key corporate plan themes is to be a confident, capable Council. This is underpinned by a series of aims including improving value for money across all services and improving governance arrangements and internal controls. In order to achieve these aims it is important that a zero tolerance to fraud stance is taken, and the threat of fraud is acknowledged, any fraudulent practises are prevented, and where perpetrated are detected, investigated and wherever possible any loss of monies is recovered. These are the goals and intended outcomes of this Policy, and are based around those of what was the National Fraud Authority's 'Fighting Fraud Locally Strategy' of "Acknowledge", "Prevent" and "Pursue":



Introduction

The public are entitled to expect the Council to carry out its business with integrity, honesty and openness and to demand the highest standards of conduct from those working for it. This policy and procedure outlines the Council's commitment to creating an anti-fraud culture and maintaining high professional and ethical standards.

What is Fraud?

For the Council's purpose fraud can be defined as the intentional distortion of financial statements or other records by persons internal or external to the Council which is carried out to conceal the misappropriation of assets or otherwise for gain (this covers theft, false accounting, bribery and corruption, deception, collusion, money laundering and identity theft). Examples of fraudulent activities include:

- The offering, giving, soliciting or acceptance of an inducement or reward that may influence the actions taken by the authority, its members or officers
- Destroying, defacing, concealing or falsifying any account, record or document required for an accounting purpose, with a view to personal gain or gain for another (including falsifying expenses claims and time records)
- Theft of cash and Council assets/property

Consequences of Fraud

Where there are any incidents of fraud within the council, it carries several negative effects, not only for the Council, but also for the council's partners, the public and Council employees. Negative effects include adverse publicity, loss of assets (anything from time to money), loss of morale, reduced performance and loss of trust.

Culture

The Council is committed to enhancing and actively promoting an anti-fraud and corruption culture where employees and the public can feel comfortable in voicing their concerns.

Responsibility

Who has responsibility for the detection of fraud, corruption and bribery within the Council?

Everyone has a responsibility for identifying and reporting any suspected instances of fraud, corruption and bribery to their line manager or, if required, direct to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) or Audit Services.

Employees

Employees are often the first line of defence in preventing fraud and are an integral part in quickly identifying fraud, corruption and bribery. All employees of the Council should be aware of their role and responsibilities as well as the policies/rules that they need to comply with, and the Council encourages any employee who suspects any irregularity to report it initially to their line manager, the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) or the Head of Audit as necessary.

Senior officers

It is the responsibility of each senior officer to establish the internal control regime for their service areas and to ensure that all activities carried out are efficient, effective and well ordered. The systems in place should ensure that if there is a breach it is promptly identified and the necessary action taken to minimise any potential loss. Senior officers should also foster an environment where employees can feel able to approach them with any concerns regarding suspected irregularities. Any such suspected irregularities brought to their attention, should be reported to the Director of Finance or the Head of Audit.

Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer)

The Director of Finance has a statutory responsibility under Section 151 of the local government act to ensure that proper arrangements are made for the council's financial affairs. Therefore, all frauds have to be reported to the S151 Officer, or their nominated officer (generally the head of audit).

Head of Audit

In accordance with the local government act the Council maintains an internal audit function, known as Audit Services. It is the responsibility of Audit Services to investigate any instances of possible fraud, corruption and bribery being perpetrated against the Council.

The Head of Audit also has responsibility for administering the Council's whistleblowing policy and procedure. Therefore, all incidents of whistleblowing, including those made anonymously, shall be reported or passed on, to the Head of Audit.

Councillors

Councillors have a responsibility as the duly elected representatives of Wolverhampton for ensuring that the assets and resources of the Council are protected from all forms of abuse (including fraud, corruption and bribery).

External audit

Independent external audit is an essential safeguard of the stewardship of public money. Part of the role of external audit is to appraise the arrangements made by the Council to prevent and detect fraud, corruption and bribery.

Suppliers, contractors and external organisations

The Council expects all of its partners that it deals with to act with honesty and integrity. The Council will similarly act at all times on the same basis.

Other related documents

This document is not to be seen as the council's sole document in relation to fraud, corruption and bribery; as such the following documents/processes have also been introduced by the Council to promote an anti fraud and corruption culture:

- Fraud awareness guide
- Financial procedure rules
- Contracts procedure rules
- Whistleblowing policy and procedure
- Anti-money laundering policy
- Fraud awareness training
- Disciplinary procedures
- Code of conduct for councillors
- Code of conduct for employees
- Clear and robust recruitment procedures
- Clear lines of responsibility and accountability

The Bribery Act 2010

This defines bribery as "giving someone a financial or other advantage to encourage that person to perform their functions or activities improperly or to reward that person for having already done so". There are four key offences under the act:

- the giving or offering of a bribe
- the request for, or acceptance of a bribe
- bribing a foreign public official
- a corporate offence of failing to prevent bribery.

The act supports the council's principle of free and fair competition in contracting and procurement. Anyone who, in the course of Council business, becomes aware that a bribe has been requested, offered, given or accepted should report their suspicions promptly, in accordance with the processes set out in this document. Facilitation payments are considered bribes (payments to induce officials to perform routine functions they are otherwise obligated to perform). Genuine hospitality or similar business expenditure that is reasonable and proportionate is allowable by the act and the codes of conduct for councillors and employees, details what is acceptable.

The penalties of committing an offence under the bribery act are up to 10 years imprisonment and an unlimited fine.

Training

The Council recognises that for a successful anti-fraud and corruption culture to be effective, suitable training should be available to all employees, and this will be provided through a variety of methods including seminars, on-line training and the production of helpful guides.

Investigations

Where someone knows, or suspects, that an irregularity or an instance of fraud, corruption or bribery is occurring, they should report it to their immediate line manager, or failing this the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer), in effect this is passed on to the head of audit. Audit Services shall, dependent upon the issue, prepare a response plan, carry out an investigation and report back appropriately.

Each allegation and their subsequent outcome shall also be reported by audit services to the Audit Committee. In the event that a member of the Audit Committee is dissatisfied with any aspect of how the concern has been dealt with, the matter will be referred to the council's external auditors.

Referrals to the Police

Decisions to refer a fraud, corruption or irregularity matter to the police will normally be taken by the Director of Finance or their nominee. Notwithstanding any action taken by the police, the Council is committed to recovering any losses incurred as a result of fraudulent activity wherever possible. This may include pursuing a civil action through the courts where this is deemed to be an appropriate course of action.

Conclusions

The Council maintains systems, procedures and guidelines that assist in the minimisation of fraud and corruption and will carry out a full investigation of any issues that arise. Such arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure they are operating effectively and efficiently.

The Council, will wherever possible, publicise its continual commitment to establishing an anti-fraud and corruption culture.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Head of Audit Services and the Audit Committee to ensure that it remains up to date, fit for purpose and represents generally accepted good practice.

Useful contact details

Anyone who has any concerns regarding the possibility of fraud, corruption or bribery taking place can contact the following:



Fraud Hotline: (01902) 550550

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week, answerphone out of office hours)

Peter Farrow - Head of Audit Services

Tel: (01902) 554460

e-mail: peter.farrow@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Mark Taylor – Director of Finance (S151 Officer)

Tel: (01902) 556609

e-mail: mark.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Kevin O’Keefe – Director of Governance/Monitoring Officer

Tel: (01902) 554910

e-mail: kevin.o’keefe@wolverhampton.gov.uk

The Council’s external auditors:

Grant Thornton UK LLP

Colmore Plaza

20 Colmore Circus

Birmingham

B4 6AT

(Tel: 0121 212 4000)

Public Concern at Work

3rd Floor

Bank Chambers

6 -10 Borough High Street

London

SE1 9QQ

(Tel: 020 7404 6609)

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