

Policy Statement

The Investigations Team will examine all types of potential benefit fraud - liaising closely with other council departments and external agencies – in order to minimise the impact of this type of crime within our borough.

We will maintain and develop a working partnership with other Government agencies and departments. For example; we recently signed a Service Level Agreement with the Kingston Department of Works and Pension (DWP) and meet together quarterly to discuss and resolve any issues that may occur.

We are committed to creating an anti-fraud culture amongst all Council staff involved with the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

We aim to achieve this by providing a point of contact for advice on fraud and providing training sessions on fraud awareness. We also produce a quarterly fraud newsletter for staff.

We will provide a point of contact for that the public can use to report fraud.

We will act on all information received from the public. Any information provided will be treated in confidence and all callers will be regarded as anonymous.

We will conduct pro-active exercises to uncover fraud within our borough. Such exercises will be conducted in partnership with other Government agencies and departments as and when required. These are two of the initiatives we undertake:

- **Housing Benefit Matching Service**
This is an exercise where our benefit records are compared to DWP records for various government benefits paid (JSA, IS, Tax Credits, Incapacity Benefit, Pensions etc). If there is a discrepancy between the two sets of records a file is created and sent to us to investigate the discrepancy.
- **The National Fraud Initiative**
This is the Audit Commission's data matching exercise in which participants across the UK from Local Government, Central government and the NHS provide data which is then matched to help reduce the level of Council Tax benefit fraud, occupational pension fraud and tenancy fraud. The information regarding possible matches is referred to Local Authorities from the Audit Commission for further enquiries.

This authority has chosen to comply with the Governments' Verification Framework. We have adopted this initiative to help prevent fraud and error in our benefit system. Working under this framework we will only accept original documents to support benefit claims. All supporting documents have to be seen and checked by an authorised Council Officer of the Revenues and Benefits Section.

Members of the Investigations Team will assist in this verification process as they will use their specialist training, equipment and contacts to identify forged documents.

This authority will take legal proceedings against any parties where appropriate and in accordance with our Fraud Prosecution Policy. We will also seek maximum publicity to deter further offenders.

All members of the Investigations Team have received detailed training on the Human Rights Act 1998. The Investigations Team will ensure that it conducts its activities in compliance with Human Rights legislation. All Investigators are fully accredited Counter Fraud Specialists.