

# Slough Borough Council

<b>Report To:</b>	Audit & Corporate Governance Committee
<b>Date:</b>	23 July 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Counter Fraud – Quarter 1 Update
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Annabel Scholes – Executive Director Corporate Resources (S151 Officer)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ian Kirby – Head of Internal Audit
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 – Counter Fraud Results Tracker Appendix 2 – Forward Together (20 June 2025)

## 1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the proactive and reactive work of the Council's Counter Fraud team during the first quarter of 2025/26.
- 1.2 Although this summary does provide a high-level overview of on-going casework, individual live cases are not referenced in any detail.

### Recommendation:

Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the work of the Counter Fraud team as detailed and acknowledge the successes as detailed within the corporate communication of 20 June 2025 (Appendix 2).

### Reason:

- 1.3 The Counter Fraud team, through the Head of Internal Audit, has committed to providing quarterly updates of activity, both proactive and reactive, and successful outcomes to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee. The report represents the first quarterly report and builds upon the Annual Counter Fraud report that was presented to the Committee on 30 April 2025.

### Commissioner Review

This report is outside the scope for pre-publication commissioner review; please check the [Commissioners' instruction 5 to CLT to sign off papers](#) for further details.

## 2. Report

### Introductory paragraph

2.1 The Counter Fraud Team (CFT) supports the Council in meeting its statutory responsibility under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. The work of the CFT underpins the Council's commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to fraud, bribery, corruption, and other irregularities, including any money laundering activity.

The CFT works closely with the Council and its partners to prevent, detect, and investigate allegations of fraud and corruption occurring within and/or against the authority. An Anti-Fraud and Corruption Response Plan has been developed to ensure that members and employees know what action to take should they become aware of or suspect fraud or corruption.

The team works on a range of high-risk areas that include, but are not limited to:

- Social Housing Fraud
- Right to Buy Fraud
- Council Tax Fraud
- Housing Tenancy Fraud
- Corporate and Internal Fraud
- Financial Investigations
- Social Care Fraud

2.2 Appendix 1 provides a table of activity and successful recovery/prosecution. The table includes the outputs from quarter 4 of 2024/25 to provide some context and useful comparison. The table for the full year, 2024/25, forms part of the Annual Report that was presented to the Committee on 30 April.

### Quarter 1 Activity

2.3 The activity table at Appendix 1 shows that although the Team continues to deliver results in areas such as blue badge fraud and property recovered and put back into stock, fraud referrals and enquiries are increasing. Referrals have increased, compared to quarter 4 2024/25, by 18% and enquiries by 42%.

2.4 Referrals to the service can come from a number of sources. The source of referrals to the department is being monitored and will be assessed for comparative/trend analysis within future reports. For quarter 1, the following table is provided as a baseline:

	Public	Police	DWP	SBC Dept.	LAIEFs*	Other	Total
April	2	46	0	1	0	0	49
May	2	21	0	1	3	1	28
June	2	26	0	0	3	3	34
Sub-total	6	93	0	2	6	4	111

\*Local Authority Information Exchange Forms

2.5 The impact of further increases in referrals and enquiries will need to be closely monitored and their impact on caseloads assessed.

### **Blue Badge Fraud – Blue Badge National Action Day 30th May 2025.**

2.6 To coincide with the designated national action day on Blue Badge fraud, the CFT took a proactive approach to addressing this issue and raising awareness at the same time. Alongside colleagues from Parking Enforcement in Slough and Windsor, the team spent the day speaking to vehicle owners displaying a Blue Badge.

During the course of the day, the team confiscated 12 badges that were being misused, 9 of them in Slough and 3 in Windsor. The 12 badges were issued by several different authorities, but of the 12:

- 10 have been formally interviewed and have received and accepted Formal Cautions
- 2 are scheduled for interview before mid-July.

In the interests of inter-authority working, we have advised/referred for investigation to Carmarthenshire County Council the use of a badge, issued by them, for an individual we know to be deceased that was displayed on a vehicle in one of Slough's car parks.

### **The London Fraud Hub**

2.7 In April 2025, the CFT became part of the London Fraud Hub as part of the National Fraud Initiative. Membership enables the CFT to come together with and share data and intelligence with a wider network of organisations, predominantly London Boroughs, to help detect and prevent fraud.

Our participation is fairly new, the impacts/benefits of participation will be closely monitored and assessed.

### **CIPFA Review of Counter Fraud in Slough 2023.**

2.8 In February 2023, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) completed a review of counter fraud within Slough BC. The review identified 20 recommendations to improve activity, governance and visibility of the service. A review of progress and update to the action plan, aligned to the operational plan tabled as part of the Annual Report in April 2025, has been completed and a revised Plan has been developed. Progress can be summarised as follows:

Recommendations	20
Implemented	4
Implemented/ On-going	6
Partially Implemented/ On-going	2
Outstanding	8

Implementation/development will continue to be monitored and progress reported as a standing part of this quarterly update.

## **Corporate Communication**

2.9 Deterring fraud is a critical part of the service's proactive responsibilities. Appendix 2 provides an extract from the 'Forward Together' internal communication issued on 20 June 2025. As well as highlighting the important role that the team plays, it also referred internal readers to three press releases that highlighted successful prosecutions for fraud, against the Council, that included Covid business loans, salary theft and Adult Social Care direct payments.

The use of communication will continue to be an essential tool in the deterrence of fraud.

## **3. Implications of the Recommendation**

### **3.1 *Financial implications***

All fraud has a detrimental financial impact on the Council. In cases where fraud is identified, recovery action is taken to minimise the impact that such instances cause. This also includes action, where appropriate, to make improvements to the financial administration arrangements within the Council as a result of frauds identified.

### **3.2 *Legal implications***

The Council has a duty under S151 of the Local Government Act to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs. To effectively discharge this duty, these arrangements include Council policies and procedures which protect the public purse through managing the risk of fraud and error.

All cases are conducted in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and if appropriate are referred to the Police for investigation.

### **3.3 *Risk management implications***

3.3.1 The risk of fraud is being managed in a number of ways including:

- Through the Counter Fraud team work on fraud, which is monitored by the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee.
- Through agreed management action taken in response to fraud investigations and/or proactive reviews.

3.3.2 There is a risk that a continuing increase in the volumes of referrals and/or enquiries outweighs the resources available to deal with them. This will be closely monitored and mitigating actions may include:

- A more stringent triage system to prioritise, accept or reject new cases
- Development a cost/benefit business case for additional investment in the team

### 3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 There are no direct environmental implications in this report.

### 3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a legal duty on the Council to have due regard to three specified matters in the exercise of their functions:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The 'protected characteristics' covered by section 149 are race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment. The duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination also covers marriage and civil partnership.

The Council acting in its role as Prosecutor must be fair, independent, and objective. Views about the ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, political views, sexual orientation, or gender identity of the suspect, victim or any witness must not influence the Council's decisions.

## 4. **Background Papers**

None