

REPORT TO: Audit and Governance Board

DATE: 24 September 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Finance

SUBJECT: Anti-Fraud and Corruption Update

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides the Audit and Governance Board with a comprehensive overview of the Council's counter-fraud and corruption activity during 2024/25. It includes:

- A summary of key developments in the fraud risk landscape
- Details of HR investigations and whistleblowing complaints received, and actions taken
- The Council's strategic plans for tackling fraud and corruption, as set out in the Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 - 2030
- The Annual Fraud Plan, which outlines the Council's operational approach to preventing, detecting, and responding to fraud and related irregularities

The report is intended to provide assurance to the Board that the Council continues to take a proactive and coordinated approach to managing fraud risks and promoting integrity across its operations.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That the Board

- 1) consider the annual update on anti-fraud and corruption activity;**
- 2) formally support the counter-fraud work being undertaken;**
- 3) approve the Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 – 2030; and**
- 4) approve the Annual Fraud Plan 2025/26**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Annual Fraud and Investigations Update Report

The Annual Fraud and Investigations Update Report (Appendix 1) provides a detailed overview of the Council's counter-fraud and corruption activity during 2024/25. It outlines the current fraud risk landscape, highlighting key threats and emerging trends. The report also summarises HR investigations,

whistleblowing complaints, and the Stage Two corporate complaints reviewed by the Audit & Investigations Team, along with the actions taken in response.

3.2 Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 - 2030

The Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 - 2030 (Appendix 2) sets out the Council's strategic approach to preventing, detecting, and responding to fraud and corruption over the next five years. This strategy should be considered in conjunction with the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, which forms part of the Council's Constitution.

3.3 Fraud Plan 2025 - 2026

The Annual Fraud Plan (Appendix 3) details the Council's operational approach to managing fraud and related irregularities. It supports the objectives of the Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 - 2030 and aligns with national guidance, including the principles set out in the *Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally (FFCL) strategy*.

The Plan sets out a structured programme of activity designed to address fraud risks across the organisation. It ensures that counter-fraud efforts are targeted at areas of highest risk, supports the delivery of corporate priorities, enables effective resource allocation, and establishes a framework for monitoring performance.

A detailed programme for 2025/26 is included, featuring proactive fraud detection work scheduled for the year. Plans for future activity are also outlined and will be updated annually in line with the outcomes of the Council's fraud risk assessment.

3.4 Governance and Oversight

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Audit and Governance Board holds delegated responsibility for oversight of counter-fraud and corruption matters. Specifically, the Board is tasked with:

- Reviewing the assessment of risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption
- Reviewing, approving and monitoring the Council's counter-fraud policies and strategies, counter-fraud activity, and associated resourcing

Consequently, relevant documents will be updated as necessary to incorporate any feedback provided by the Board.

4.0 POLICY, FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

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- The Council's commitment to robust anti-fraud and corruption arrangements is reflected in the development and implementation of the Counter Fraud Strategy 2025 -2030 and the Annual Fraud Plan. These documents reinforce existing policy frameworks, including the Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, and align with national best practice guidance.

- 4.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, effective counter-fraud activity contributes to the protection of public funds, supports financial resilience, and helps to minimise losses due to fraud. The proactive measures outlined in the Annual Fraud Plan are designed to ensure that resources are targeted efficiently and that fraud risks are managed in a cost-effective manner.
- 4.3 The report also supports the Council's wider governance and assurance processes, including the Annual Governance Statement.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Counter-fraud activity supports the responsible management of public funds, helping to ensure resources are used effectively and for their intended purpose. This directly contributes to the delivery of all Council priorities by protecting financial integrity, enabling efficient service delivery, and reinforcing public trust in the organisation.

5.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

See 5.1 above

5.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

See 5.1 above

5.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

See 5.1 above

5.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

See 5.1 above

5.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

See 5.1 above

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 Fraud and corruption present significant risks to the Council's financial integrity, reputation, and ability to deliver services effectively. The implementation of the Counter Fraud Strategy 2025–2030 and the Annual Fraud Plan helps to mitigate these risks by strengthening the Council's preventative, detective, and responsive measures.
- 6.2 Failure to maintain robust counter-fraud arrangements could result in financial loss, reputational damage, and reduced public confidence. The proactive approach outlined in this report supports the Council's overall risk management framework and contributes to the assurance required for the Annual Governance Statement.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 There are no direct equality or diversity implications arising from this report. However, the Council's counter-fraud activity is delivered in accordance with its commitment to fairness, transparency, and inclusion. All investigations and related processes are conducted in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, ensuring that individuals are treated equitably and without bias.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.