

Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy

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CONTENTS

		Page(s)
	Anti-fraud policy	3 - 4
Section One	Introduction	5 - 6
Section Two	Culture	7 - 8
Section Three	Prevention	9 - 12
Section Four	Detection & Investigation	13 - 14
Section Five	Deterrence	15 - 16
Section Six	Bribery Act Policy	17 - 19
Section Seven	Anti Money Laundering Policy	20 – 24
Section Eight	Fraud Response Plan	25 – 28

Anti-Fraud Policy

Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) is committed to high legal, ethical and moral standards, and the proper accountability of public funds.

The Authority will not tolerate fraud and corruption in the administration of its responsibilities, whether from inside or outside the Authority.

The Authority's expectation of propriety and accountability is that Members and staff at all levels will lead by example in ensuring adherence to legal requirements, rules, procedures and practices.

The Authority also expects that individuals and organisations with which it comes into contact will act towards the Authority with integrity.

The key controls in place to reduce the likelihood of fraud are:

- The Authority has an effective anti-fraud and corruption policy and maintains a culture that will not tolerate fraud or corruption
- All Members and staff act with integrity and lead by example
- Senior managers are required to deal swiftly and firmly with those who defraud or attempt to defraud the authority or who are corrupt
- High standards of conduct are promoted amongst Members by the standards committee
- The maintenance of a register of interests in which any hospitality or gifts accepted must be recorded
- Confidential reporting procedures are in place and operate effectively
- Legislation including the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 is adhered to
- Standard contract clauses prohibit fraud and corruption

Additionally, the Authority:

- Maintains a Corporate Fraud Team who plays a key role in both the prevention and investigation of matters relating to suspected fraud, corruption and abuse of council services and property.
- Uses the Internal Audit Service as an independent appraisal function for the review of the Council's internal control system as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources
- Recognises the importance of criminal prosecution in deterring fraud and will seek to prosecute offenders where appropriate
- Supports the work of the police and other external agencies in fighting fraud and corruption in the public sector.

- Is a member of the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN), and
- Participates in the National Fraud Initiative, which is the Cabinet Office's biennial data matching exercise designed to combat fraud.

This policy applies to suspected fraud and corruption, which concerns EFDC, involving employees, Members and/or external parties unless the matter is more properly a matter for the Police. Any investigation required will be conducted without regard to any person's relationship to EFDC, position or length of service.

Section One

Introduction

EFDC aims to provide community leadership and quality services. This strategy document embodies a series of measures designed to frustrate any attempted fraudulent or corrupt act and the steps to be taken if such an act occurs.

In applying this strategy regard will be had to all relevant EFDC policies and any obligations as an employer and the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) defines fraud and corruption as:

Fraud – *“the intentional distortion of financial statements or other records by persons internal or external to the authority which is carried out to conceal the misappropriation of assets or otherwise for gain”*.

In addition, fraud can be defined as *“the intentional distortion of financial statements or other records by persons internal or external to the authority, which is carried out to mislead or misrepresent”*.

Corruption – *“the offering, giving, soliciting or acceptance of an inducement or reward which may influence the action of any person”*.

The passing of The Fraud Act 2006 into legislation created specific criminal offences surrounding fraud.

They are:

- Fraud by False Representation
- Fraud by Failing to Disclose Information (where there is a legal duty to do so)
- Fraud by Abuse of Position
- Possession of Articles for use in a fraud
- Making or Supplying Articles for use in Fraud

This policy strongly advocates the following 4 key principles in the Council's approach to combatting fraud and corruption, namely:

- **Culture** – The ongoing process of maintaining and developing a “top to bottom” anti fraud and corruption culture throughout the organisation focusing not just on employees, but members, suppliers, contractors and the public also.
- **Prevention** – Ensuring that a range of anti-fraud measures are deployed throughout the Council such as internal audits, fraud awareness sessions etc.
- **Detection and Investigation** – Where fraud and / or corruption are suspected, the Council must ensure that investigations are carried out by professional and qualified investigators to the highest standards of fairness and probity, having due regard to the appropriate legislation at all times.
- **Deterrence** – In the event of fraud and / or corruption being discovered, the Council must take appropriate steps to ensure that further instances do not occur by utilising methods such as criminal prosecution, disciplinary action, etc. The Council will also seek to obtain financial redress where public money has been lost by utilising The Proceeds of Crime Act wherever appropriate.

Section Two

Culture

EFDC will not tolerate fraud and corruption in the administration of its responsibilities, whether from inside or outside the Authority. Fraud risk is considered as part of the Authority's overall risk management strategy.

The prevention and detection of fraud and corruption, and the protection of the public purse is everyone's responsibility.

The Members and employees play an important role in creating and maintaining this culture. They are positively encouraged to raise concerns regarding fraud and corruption, irrespective of seniority, rank or status, in the knowledge that such concerns will, wherever possible, be treated in confidence. In order to make sure this occurs; the Council has and maintains a separate Whistleblowing Policy.

Members, employees or contractors are encouraged to raise concerns in line with the fraud response plan (section 8) if they reasonably believe that one or more of the following has occurred, is in the process of occurring or is likely to occur:

- a criminal offence
- a failure to comply with a statutory or legal obligation
- improper unauthorised use of public or other funds
- improper use or misappropriation of assets
- a miscarriage of justice
- maladministration, misconduct or malpractice
- any other similar occurrences
- deliberate concealment of any of the above.

Management Board will ensure that any allegations received in any way, including anonymous letters or phone calls, will be taken seriously and investigated in an appropriate manner, subject to legislative requirements.

The Council has agreed the provision of a Corporate Fraud Team in order to bring a uniform approach to fraud investigation and to adequately resource the detection and prevention of fraud.

The Corporate Fraud Team (CFT) now has the remit to investigate matters of suspected fraud, theft and corruption within EFDC (with the exception of Housing Benefit fraud investigation which transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions). The CFT will, as one of its key operating principles also seek to maintain an anti-fraud and corruption culture by engaging staff, members and the general public by way of fraud awareness sessions and seeking to publicise its successes both internally and externally.

EFDC will deal firmly with those who defraud the Authority, or who are corrupt, or who are responsible for financial malpractice.

When fraud or corruption has occurred because of a breakdown in the Authority's systems or procedures, the Corporate Governance Group in conjunction with the Corporate Fraud Team and Internal Audit will ensure that appropriate improvements in systems of control are implemented to prevent a recurrence.

Section Three

Prevention

It is important that the Council recognises and manages the risks relating to fraud and corruption in order to prevent them from occurring. Furthermore, it is imperative that these risks are routinely considered as part of the Council's overall approach to risk management. In order to understand the nature of these risks, the following have been identified as key issues that are relevant to EFDC:

- Social Housing Tenancy Fraud – this includes risks such as fraudulent housing applications, mutual exchanges, illegal subletting etc.
- The Right to Buy scheme – fraudulent applications and suspected money laundering
- Money Laundering – Exposure to suspect transactions
- Council Tax – fraudulently claimed discounts (including Local Council Tax Support), refund scams
- Non-Domestic Rates – fraudulent applications for exemptions, unlisted properties
- Grants (including Disabled Facilities Grants) – false eligibility and applications, diverted funds, works not carried out.
- Insurance Fraud – suspected false claims particularly those relating to personal injury
- No recourse to public funds – fraudulent eligibility for Council services such as Social Housing
- Payroll Fraud – false and “ghost” employees, overtime and mileage claims, expenses.
- Internal Frauds – such as fund diversion, accepting bribes, stealing monies and / or Council property, social housing misallocations for personal gain, working elsewhere whilst off sick, abuse of position such as misuse of assets / resources.
- Procurement Fraud – tendering issues, split contracts, double invoicing
- Cyber Crime / Fraud – frauds such as false applications for services, fund diversion.

It is important to note that the above represents the key fraud risk areas and examples of each. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

As with the culture, the concept of fraud prevention applies to the organisation from top to bottom.

Members

As elected representatives, all Members of the Authority must act in accordance with statutory requirements and the Members' Code of Conduct. These matters and other guidance are specifically brought to the attention of Members at the induction course for new Members and include rules on the declaration and registration of potential areas of conflict between Members' Council duties and responsibilities, and any other areas of their personal or professional lives.

Members sign to the effect that they have read, understood and will comply with the Member's Code of Conduct when they take office. The Monitoring Officer advises Members of new legislative or procedural requirements.

Managers

Managers at all levels are responsible for the communication and implementation of this policy in their work area. They are also responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the Authority's Financial Regulations and Standing Orders, and that the requirements of each are being met in their everyday business activities. In addition, managers must make sure their staff are aware of the requirements of the Officers' Code of Conduct through the induction process.

Managers are expected to strive to create an environment in which their staff feel able to approach them with any concerns they may have about suspected irregularities. Where they are unsure of the procedures, they must refer to the information in the Confidential Reporting Policy.

Special arrangements will apply where employees are responsible for cash handling or are in charge of financial systems and systems that generate payments, for example payroll, the integrated benefits computer system or council tax. Managers must ensure that relevant training is provided for staff. Checks must be carried out at least annually to ensure that proper procedures are being followed.

The Authority recognises that a key preventative measure in dealing with fraud and corruption is for managers to take effective steps at the recruitment stage to establish, as far as possible, the honesty and integrity of potential employees, whether for permanent, temporary or casual posts.

The Authority has a formal recruitment procedure, which contains appropriate safeguards on matters such as written references and verifying qualifications held.

As with other public bodies, police checks are undertaken on employees working with children.

Further checks will be introduced in areas where an increased risk of potential fraud and corruption has been identified (for example, positions whereby a professional qualification is essential).

The Assistant Director (Human Resources) will keep under review the checks that legislation allows.

Employees

Each employee is governed in their work by the Authority's Procurement Rules and Financial Regulations, the Officer Code of Conduct and various policies. Guidelines on gifts and hospitality, and codes of conduct associated with professional and personal conduct and disclosure of interests are contained within the Staff Handbook, which is available to all staff via the corporate intranet.

Employees are responsible for ensuring that they follow the instructions given to them by management, particularly in relation to the safekeeping of the assets of the Authority. These will be included in induction training and procedure manuals. Employees are expected always to be aware of the possibility that fraud, corruption or theft may exist in the workplace and be able to share their concerns with management. If for any reason, they feel unable to speak to their manager, they can

relay their suspicions to either the Chief Internal Auditor or the Corporate Fraud Manager. Employees can also avail themselves of the Confidential Reporting Policy.

Conflicts of Interest

Both Members and employees must ensure that they avoid situations where there is a potential for a conflict of interests. Such situations can arise with externalisation of services, partnering arrangements, internal tendering, planning and land issues, etc. Effective role separation will ensure decisions made are, and are seen to be made, based upon impartial advice thereby avoiding improper disclosure of confidential information. As from 2017, the Performance Development Review process will require employees to annually confirm their position regarding any potential conflicts of interest.

Official Guidance

In addition to Financial Regulations and Standing Orders, Services will have their own procedures to prevent and detect fraud. There may also be audit reports that recommend methods to minimise losses to the Authority. Staff must be made aware of these various sources of guidance and alter their working practices accordingly.

Role of the Corporate Fraud Team

The Corporate Fraud Team role in both the prevention and investigation of instances of suspected fraud against the Council. Fraud awareness training is given to officers within the Authority to assist in ensuring that any cases referred to the team contain good quality information to assist with the investigation. All investigations are carried out in accordance with the respective legislation.

In cases where the offence is deliberate and serious enough to warrant prosecution, consideration will be given to the Council's fraud prosecution / sanction policy. If deemed appropriate legal proceedings will be undertaken in conjunction with Legal Services and / or other bodies such as the Police.

Utilising the provisions of Section 222 of The Local Government Act 1972, the Corporate Fraud Team in conjunction with Legal Services are appropriately authorised to undertake investigations and criminal prosecutions into cases of fraud and corruption that involve the Council.

The Role of Internal Audit

Internal Audit plays a vital preventative role in trying to ensure that systems and procedures are in place to prevent and detect fraud and corruption. They liaise with management to recommend changes in procedures to prevent potential or further losses to the Authority. Internal Audit will also work closely in conjunction with the Corporate Fraud Team.

The Role of External Audit

Independent external audit is an essential safeguard in the stewardship of public money. This role is delivered through the carrying out of specific reviews that are designed to test (amongst other things) the adequacy of the Authority's financial systems, and arrangements for preventing and detecting fraud and corruption. It is not the external auditor's function to prevent fraud and irregularity, but the integrity of

public funds is at all times a matter of general concern. External auditors are always alert to the possibility of fraud and irregularity, and will act without undue delay if grounds for suspicion come to their notice. The external auditor has a responsibility to review the Authority's arrangements to prevent and detect fraud and irregularity, and arrangements designed to limit the opportunity for corrupt practices.

Co-operation with Others

The Corporate Fraud Team and Internal Audit have arranged (subject to legislative requirements regarding data sharing) and will keep under review procedures and arrangements to develop and encourage the exchange of information on national and local fraud and corruption activity in relation to local authorities with external agencies such as:

- Police
- County, Unitary and District groups
- External Audit
- Government departments
- National bodies such as The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, Action Fraud etc.

Section Four

Detection and Investigation

The Corporate Fraud Team and Internal Audit play an important role in the detection of fraud and corruption. Included in their respective business plans are reviews of system financial controls and specific fraud and corruption tests, spot checks and unannounced visits.

In addition to Internal Audit, there are numerous systems controls in place to deter fraud and corruption, but it is often the vigilance of employees and members of the public that aids detection.

In some cases, frauds are discovered by chance or 'tip-off' and arrangements are in place to deal with such information properly.

All suspected irregularities are required to be reported (orally or in writing) either by the person with whom the initial concern was raised or by the originator, as detailed in the Authority's Confidential Reporting Policy. This will:

- ensure the consistent treatment of information regarding fraud and corruption
- facilitate a proper and thorough investigation by an investigator from the Corporate Fraud Team in accordance with the requirements of current legislation. Should a member of the Corporate Fraud Team be implicated or the subject of an investigation, either the Chief Internal Auditor or Monitoring Officer will provide a suitable, qualified investigator.

This process will apply to all the following areas:

- a) fraud/corruption by Members
- b) fraud/corruption by Authority employees
- c) fraud/corruption by contractors' employees
- d) fraud/corruption by the public/ external parties

In most cases of reported fraud and / or corruption, any allegation or suspicion will, in the first instance be investigated by the Corporate Fraud Team. Depending on the nature of the case, the CFT may consider undertaking joint investigations with other relevant parties (such as other Local Authorities, Government Departments, and the Police etc.).

Alternatively, the CFT may, in some cases, refer the investigation on to another investigating body if more appropriate to do so.

Any decision to refer a matter to the police will be taken by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, the s151 Officer, the Director of the responsible service and the Corporate Fraud Manager / Chief Internal Auditor however any investigation whereby financial impropriety is discovered, will be dealt with, normally, in the first instance by the Corporate Fraud Team. However, the mere fact that a Corporate Fraud Team and / or police investigation leads to them taking no further action will not compromise any private action/procedure or investigation that the Council may pursue.

The Authority's disciplinary procedure will be used to facilitate a thorough investigation of any allegation of improper behaviour by employees. Decisions to refer potential criminal activity by a Member to the Police will be taken by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chief Executive and s151 Officer.

If a member is suspected of the specific offence of failing to disclose a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as defined by the Localism Act 2011 the decision to refer the matter to the Police will be taken by the Monitoring Officer following an initial report by the Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Section Five

Deterrence

Criminal Prosecution

In order to strike the correct balance taking into account punishment and deterrence, the Council will undertake criminal prosecutions where it is considered evidentially appropriate and in the public interest. A corporate policy will be developed taking account of legal guidelines, to encompass the public, Members, contractors and employees. It is designed to clarify the Authority's action in specific cases and to deter others from committing offences against the authority. However, it also recognises that it may not always be in the public interest to refer cases for criminal proceedings and will seek to always take a fair and balanced view on each matter according to each case's particular merits.

Disciplinary Action

Theft, fraud and corruption are serious offences against the Authority and employees will face disciplinary action if there is evidence that they have been involved in these activities. Disciplinary action may be taken in addition to, or instead of, criminal proceedings, depending on the circumstances of each individual case, but in a consistent manner.

Members will face appropriate action under this strategy if they are found to have been involved in theft, fraud or corruption against the Authority. Action may be taken in addition to, or instead of, criminal proceedings, depending on the circumstances of each individual case, but in a consistent manner.

This aspect of the policy is to be read in conjunction with the powers of the Standards Committee, the delegated powers of the Monitoring Officer and deputy Monitoring Officer and the adopted Code of Conduct.

Publicity

The Council will optimise the publicity opportunities associated with anti-fraud and corruption activity within the Authority. As a matter of course, a press release will be drafted following any successful criminal prosecution and passed to PR in order for them to ensure that the results of any action taken, are reported positively in the media. This will be particularly relevant where a financial loss to the Council has occurred and any action taken to recover any such losses will also be promoted.

Provision will also be made for publicity to be taken for any such cases whereby details cannot be made public (for example: where Formal Cautions and / or financial penalties are utilised). In these cases, any press release will contain the pertinent details but will not identify individuals by name.

From time to time, the Council may be approached by the media such as television, radio etc. in order to provide content regarding anti-fraud and corruption activities. It is acknowledged that this type of media publicity can be extremely useful in promoting anti-fraud activities and as a tool for deterrence. Should such approaches be received, they are to be considered on a case by case basis with the involvement of both PR and Corporate Governance Group at the earliest opportunity.

All anti-fraud and corruption activities, including the update of this strategy, will be publicised in order to make employees and the public aware of the Authority's commitment to taking action on fraud and corruption when it occurs.

Regular reports will be made to the Audit and Governance Committee, about countering fraud and corruption activities and their success or otherwise.

Section Six

Bribery Act Policy

Objective of this policy

This policy provides a coherent and consistent framework to enable Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Members and employees to understand and implement arrangements enabling compliance. In conjunction with related policies and key documents it will also enable Members and employees to identify and effectively report a potential breach.

We require that Members and all staff, including those permanently employed, temporary agency staff and contractors:

- act honestly and with integrity at all times and safeguard the organisation's resources for which they are responsible
- comply with the spirit, as well as the letter, of the laws and regulations of all jurisdictions in which the Council operates, in respect of the lawful and responsible conduct of activities.

Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all of the Council's activities. For partners, joint ventures, agents and suppliers, we will seek to promote the adoption of policies consistent with the principles set out in this policy.

Within the Council, the responsibility to control the risk of bribery occurring resides at all levels of the Council. It does not rest solely within assurance functions, but in all business units and corporate functions.

This policy covers all staff, including all levels and grades, those permanently employed, temporary agency staff, contractors, agents, elected Councillors, co-opted members of the public, volunteers and consultants.

The Council's commitment to action

The Council commits to:

- Setting out a clear anti-bribery policy and keeping it up to date
- Making all Members and employees aware of their responsibilities to adhere strictly to this policy at all times
- Training all Members and employees so that they can recognise and avoid the use of bribery by themselves and others
- Encouraging its Members and employees to be vigilant and to report any suspicions of bribery, providing them with suitable channels of communication and ensuring sensitive information is treated appropriately
- Rigorously investigating instances of alleged bribery and assisting police and other appropriate authorities in any resultant prosecution

- Taking firm and vigorous action against any individual(s) involved in bribery
- Provide information to all Members and employees to report breaches and suspected breaches of this policy
- Include appropriate clauses in contracts to prevent bribery.

Facilitation payments

Facilitation payments are not tolerated and are illegal. Facilitation payments are unofficial payments made to public officials in order to secure or expedite actions.

Gifts and hospitality

This policy does not change the requirements of our gifts and hospitality policy. This makes it clear that:

Sample tokens of modest value bearing the name or insignia of the organisation giving them (for example, pens, diaries or calendars) whether given personally, or received in the post, may be retained unless they could be regarded as an inducement or reward. You should refuse the offer or invitation (or return the gift) unless your Service Director has advised you that it may be accepted or retained.

Public contracts and failure to prevent bribery

Under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (which gives effect to EU law in the UK), a company is automatically and perpetually debarred from competing for public contracts where it is convicted of a corruption offence or “the offence of bribery”.

Organisations that are convicted of “failing to prevent bribery” are not automatically barred from participating in tenders for public contracts.

The Council has the discretion to exclude organisations convicted of this offence.

Member and Staff responsibilities

All Members and staff are required to avoid activity that breaches this policy. The prevention, detection and reporting of bribery and other forms of corruption are the responsibility of all those working for the Council or under its control.

Members and staff must:

- ensure that they read, understand and comply with this policy
- raise concerns as soon as possible if they believe or suspect that a conflict with this policy has occurred, or may occur in the future.

Staff

- As well as the possibility of civil action and criminal prosecution, staff that breach this policy may face disciplinary action, which could result in summary dismissal for gross misconduct. Dismissal can still be an outcome with or without civil action or criminal prosecution.

Members

The Member Code of Conduct requires that where a Member acts as a representative of the authority he or she must not use or attempt to use their position as a Member improperly to confer on or secure for themselves or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage.

Allegations against a Member for breach will be routed through the Standards complaints process administered by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Raising a concern

This Council is committed to ensuring that all of us have a safe, reliable, and confidential way of reporting any suspicious activity. We want Members and each and every member of staff to know how they can raise concerns.

We all have a responsibility to help detect, prevent and report instances of bribery. If you have a concern regarding a suspected instance of bribery or corruption, please speak up – your information and assistance will help. The sooner you act, the sooner it can be resolved.

Preferably the disclosure will be made and resolved internally (e.g. to your Section Manager/Assistant Director/Director). Secondly, where internal disclosure proves inappropriate, concerns can be raised with the External Auditor or relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations.

Concerns can be reported anonymously. In the event that an incident of bribery is reported, we will act as soon as possible to evaluate the situation. We have a clearly defined Anti Fraud Strategy which sets out procedures for investigating fraud, misconduct and non-compliance issues and these will be followed in any investigation of this kind.

Members and staff who refuse to accept a bribe, or those who raise concerns can understandably be worried about the repercussions. The Council aims to encourage openness and will support anyone who raises a genuine concern in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

The Council is committed to ensuring nobody suffers detrimental treatment through refusing to take part in bribery, or because of reporting a concern in good faith.

Section Seven

Anti-Money Laundering Policy

Introduction

Although local authorities are not directly covered by the requirements of the Money Laundering Regulations 2007, guidance from CIPFA indicates that they should comply with the underlying spirit of the legislation and regulations.

Epping Forest District Council is committed to the highest possible standards of conduct and has, therefore, put in place appropriate and proportionate anti-money laundering safeguards and reporting arrangements.

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all employees and contractors, whether permanent or temporary, and Members of the Council.

Its aim is to enable employees and Members to respond to a concern they have in the course of their dealings for the Council. Individuals who have a concern relating to a matter outside work should contact the Police.

Definition of Money Laundering

The most common motive for crime is financial gain or to obtain valuable property. Whenever criminals do anything with that financial gain or criminal property, they 'launder' it. Money laundering offences are serious; they carry sentences of up to 14 years imprisonment, but criminals and their associates still commit them every day.

Money laundering is the process by which criminals try to hide the origin of the proceeds of their crimes, making it look as if those proceeds were acquired legitimately. In doing so, criminal property obtained unlawfully is turned into property or money that can be accessed via legitimate methods without arousing suspicion. In other words, 'laundering' is the process of turning 'dirty' money into 'clean' money.

Money laundering has three distinct phases. They are:

- Placement; the movement of criminally-obtained money into the wider economy;
- Layering; undertaking transactions (perhaps bogus) to conceal the origin of the money; and
- Integration; making it look as if money has come from a legitimate source.

Two distinct offences affect employee's contractors and Members of the Council

- Failure to disclose one of the offences listed above, where there are reasonable grounds for knowledge or suspicion.
- Tipping off a person(s) who is or is suspected of being involved in money laundering in such a way as to reduce the likelihood of or prejudice an investigation.

Although the term 'money laundering' is generally used to describe the activities of organised crime, for most people it will involve a suspicion that someone they know, or know of, is benefiting financially from dishonest activities.

Successful money laundering means criminals can enjoy the fruits of their criminality and fund further criminal activity. Stopping money laundering disrupts organised crime by removing the life-blood of the 'business' and prevents low level criminals from moving up into major level crime.

Requirements of the Money Laundering Legislation

The main requirements of the legislation are:

- To appoint a money laundering reporting officer.
- Maintain client identification procedures known as know your customer (KYC) and know your business (KYB).
- Implement a procedure to enable the reporting of suspicions of money laundering.
- Maintain record keeping procedures.

The Money Laundering Reporting Officer (MLRO)

The Council must appoint an MLRO to act as the focal point within the organisation for money laundering matters. The MLRO is responsible for:

- receiving disclosures from other staff; and
- deciding whether disclosures should be passed on to NCA.

The MLRO must keep copies of all disclosures received by them, notes of action taken and copies of all correspondence with NCA and other agencies.

Identifying and disclosing suspicious transactions

Epping Forest District Council will consider the threats to Council being used by money launderers and put systems in place to guard against them. Policies and procedures should be laid out clearly so that all relevant staff understand and have access to them.

The officer nominated to receive disclosures about money laundering activity within the Council is the Director of Resources, Bob Palmer. He can be contacted as follows:

Bob Palmer - Director of Resources
Civic Offices
Epping
Essex
CM16 4BZ

Telephone: 01992 564279.
Email: bpalmer@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

In the absence of the MLRO, the Council's Accredited Financial Investigator is authorised to deputise for him and can be contacted via The Corporate Fraud Team, telephone number 01992 564763 or by email at investigations@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

All suspicions should be reported directly to the MLRO or his deputy using the relevant documentation.

Client Identification Procedures

Although not a legal requirement, the Council has developed formal client identification procedures which must be followed when Council land or property is being sold. These procedures require individuals and if appropriate, companies to provide proof of identity and current address (KYC).

All verification documents are capable of being forged and can be bought over the internet. For this reason, industry guidance usually recommends face-to-face meetings with new clients. Excuses for non-attendance and excuses for missing documents should be explored and treated with some scepticism.

If satisfactory evidence is not obtained at the outset of a matter, then the transaction must not be progressed and a disclosure report must be submitted to the Money Laundering Reporting Officer.

All personal data must be collected, kept or destroyed in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Reporting Procedure for Suspicions of Money Laundering

Where you know or suspect that money laundering activity is taking/has taken place, or become concerned that your involvement in a matter may amount to a prohibited act under the Act, you must disclose this as soon as practicable to the MLRO. The disclosure should be within "hours" of the information coming to your attention, not weeks or months later.

Your disclosure should be made to the MLRO using the disclosure report; the report must include as much detail as possible including

- Full details of the people involved
- Full details of the nature of their/your involvement.
- The types of money laundering activity involved
- The dates of such activities
- Whether the transactions have happened, are ongoing or are imminent;
- Where they took place;
- How they were undertaken;
- The (likely) amount of money/assets involved;
- Why, exactly, you are suspicious.

Along with any other available information to enable the MLRO to make a sound judgment as to whether there are reasonable grounds for knowledge or suspicion of money laundering and to enable him to prepare his report to the National Crime Agency (NCA), where appropriate. You should also enclose copies of any relevant supporting documentation.

Once you have reported the matter to the MLRO you must follow any directions he may give you. You must NOT make any further enquiries into the matter yourself: any necessary investigation will be undertaken by the NCA. Simply report your suspicions to the MLRO who will refer the matter on to the NCA if appropriate. All members of staff will be required to co-operate with the MLRO and the authorities during any subsequent money laundering investigation.

Similarly, at no time and under no circumstances should you voice any suspicions to the person(s) whom you suspect of money laundering, even if the NCA has given consent to a particular transaction proceeding, without the specific consent of the MLRO; otherwise you may commit a criminal offence of “tipping off”.

Do not, therefore, make any reference on a client file to a report having been made to the MLRO – should the client exercise their right to see the file, then such a note will obviously tip them off to the report having been made and may render you liable to prosecution. The MLRO will keep the appropriate records in a confidential manner.

Consideration of the disclosure by the Money Laundering Reporting Officer

Upon receipt of a disclosure report, the MLRO must note the date of receipt on his section of the report and acknowledge receipt of it. He should also advise you of the timescale within which he expects to respond to you.

The MLRO will consider the report and any other available internal information he thinks relevant e.g.:

- reviewing other transaction patterns and volumes;
- the length of any business relationship involved;
- the number of any one-off transactions and linked one-off transactions;
- any identification evidence held;

And undertake such other reasonable inquiries he thinks appropriate in order to ensure that all available information is taken into account in deciding whether a report to the NCA is required (such enquiries being made in such a way as to avoid any appearance of tipping off those involved). The MLRO may also need to discuss the report with you.

Once the MLRO has evaluated the disclosure report and any other relevant information, he must make a timely determination as to whether:

- there is actual or suspected money laundering taking place; or
- there are reasonable grounds to know or suspect that is the case; and
- whether he needs to seek consent from the NCA for a particular transaction to proceed.

Where the MLRO does so conclude, then he must disclose the matter as soon as practicable to the NCA on their standard report form and in the prescribed manner, unless he has a reasonable excuse for non-disclosure to the NCA (for example, if you are a lawyer and you wish to claim legal professional privilege for not disclosing the information).

Where the MLRO suspects money laundering but has a reasonable excuse for non-disclosure, then he must note the report accordingly; he can then immediately give his consent for any ongoing or imminent transactions to proceed.

In cases where legal professional privilege may apply, the MLRO must liaise with the Council's Financial Investigator to decide whether there is a reasonable excuse for not reporting the matter to the NCA.

All disclosure reports referred to the MLRO and reports made by him to the NCA must be retained by the MLRO in a confidential file kept for that purpose, for a minimum of five years.

The MLRO commits a criminal offence if he knows or suspects, or has reasonable grounds to do so, through a disclosure being made to him, that another person is engaged in money laundering and he does not disclose this as soon as practicable to the NCA.

Training

Officers considered likely to be exposed to suspicious situations, will be made aware of these by their senior officer and provided with appropriate training.

Additionally, all employees and Members will be familiarised with the legal and regulatory requirements relating to money laundering and how they affect both the Council and themselves.

Notwithstanding the paragraphs above, it is the duty of officers and Members to report all suspicious transactions whether they have received their training or not.

Section 8

Epping Forest District Council Fraud Response Plan

Introduction

The Fraud Response Plan defines the way in which the Council applies its various policies and procedures to suspected instances of theft, fraud corruption and bribery. It fits in with, and is designed to be read in conjunction with the Council's Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy, Bribery Policy, Anti Money Laundering Policy and the Whistleblowing / Confidential Reporting Policy. The aim of this plan is to provide clear guidance for dealing with these issues, access to rapid relevant advice and a guide for managers on how to react and deal with suspicions of fraud, theft, corruption and bribery.

Additionally, it seeks to give a brief outline on how investigations will be progressed (although no detail will be given regarding investigation techniques etc.).

The Fraud Response Plan is designed to ensure timely and effective action in the event of suspected fraud by:

- Seeking to minimise the extent of the fraud by taking prompt action
- Preventing further losses where fraud had occurred.
- Maximising the recovery (or the chances of recovering) any financial losses
- Ensuring the accuracy and integrity of evidence for successful criminal prosecution and / or disciplinary action
- The early identification of any system weaknesses and the lessons to be learnt for preventing them in the future
- Maximising positive publicity where frauds are discovered and dealt with.
- Deterring others from any illegal / inappropriate conduct they may be committing or contemplating.

The Manager's Role in dealing with suspected fraud

First Response

Where managers suspect a fraud or involvement in a fraud is taking place, the first course of action **must** be to contact the Director of Governance, Chief Internal Auditor or the Corporate Fraud Manager who will ensure that the Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive are informed.

Although, the Council no longer investigates Housing Benefit fraud, where a suspicion occurs of a staff member's involvement in a Housing Benefit (including Local Council Tax Support) fraud, the above steps should still be followed.

All other suspicions of benefit fraud (including Local Council Tax Support) must be reported to the Compliance Manager within the Benefits Division. Suspicions can also be reported directly to The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) via their website (www.gov.uk/report-benefit-fraud) or by calling the National Benefit Fraud Hotline on 0800 854440 or by textphone on 0800 328 0512. It may be prudent to seek the advice of either The Corporate Fraud Manager or The Compliance Manager before contacting the DWP however, as Local Council Tax Support cannot be investigated by the DWP.

In usual circumstances, the suspicion will be passed to the Corporate Fraud Team to assess and undertake an investigation if appropriate. The Corporate Fraud Manager / Chief Internal Auditor will retain overall responsibility for the conduct of the investigation, however it is probable that the matter will be allocated to a Corporate Fraud Investigator to undertake any investigation. As part of the Internal Audit service, the Corporate Fraud Team will be independent of any service area under investigation and all of the officers comprising the Corporate Fraud Team currently are fully trained and accredited investigators each holding the qualification of Accredited Counter Fraud Officer / Specialist whilst the Corporate Fraud Manager also holds the qualification of Accredited Counter Fraud Manager.

There may be circumstances where it is appropriate for managers to undertake some preliminary enquiries to ascertain the validity of an allegation or irregularity (for example, to establish whether on the face of it, there is a case to be investigated), however before embarking on such action, advice should always be sought from a member of the Corporate Fraud Team as such action may alert the fraudster and could result in the concealing or destroying of vital evidence or compromise the investigation and the collection of further evidence.

The investigating officer will liaise and work with Human Resources at the earliest available opportunity on disciplinary matters such as suspending the staff member to enable further investigation and protect vital evidence.

Initial Enquiries

As stated above, the manager may make discreet initial enquiries in order to:

- Determine any facts that gave rise to the suspicion
- Examine any factors to determine whether there has been a genuine mistake made or whether an irregularity has occurred

Any actions and findings should be clearly recorded and documented ensuring that access is restricted (for example, not held on an “open” area of the computer network or in the case of paper notes, making sure they are securely locked away).

It is important that the suspected perpetrator is not interviewed at this stage nor any allegations / suspicions put to them. If in doubt at any point, the manager must seek the guidance of the Corporate Fraud Team or the Chief Internal Auditor.

Formal Investigation

If a formal investigation is required, it will be conducted by a qualified Corporate Fraud Investigator. The nature of the investigation, lines of enquiry followed and evidence obtained will vary depending on the irregularity being investigated and will, for the most part be fluid and reactive. Generally, however, the investigating officer will be seeking to gather evidence by way of interviews, the taking of written witness statements and the obtaining of evidence be it physical, documentary etc.

The investigating officer will consult and take advice from Human Resources particularly on matters regarding employment law, policies and procedural matters. It is imperative however, that a clear distinction must be made in these circumstances between those advising the investigating officer and those advising the staff member.

Legal Services will be consulted as appropriate to advise or seek external advice in order to support any investigation.

Any investigation will be conducted with full compliance with The Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1996 which governs the conduct of a criminal investigation (such as obtaining and recording evidence etc.) as well as any other legislation that may apply such as The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), The Human Rights Act 1998 and Data Protection Act etc. (this list is meant as an example and is not exhaustive).

In general terms however, the following principles will apply to the investigation:

- Any investigation will be conducted promptly (subject to evidence gathering activities) with periodic updates given as appropriate to the Chief Internal Auditor and / or the Director of the relevant service.
- All actions and evidence will be recorded either by written or electronic means and stored securely with access given purely on a “need to know” basis.
- Enquiries and evidence gathering activities will be undertaken as discreetly as possible with sensitivities observed where appropriate.
- Confidentiality will be maintained throughout with information only shared where circumstances and the law allows.

Where it is considered appropriate, the investigation may involve the input of other agencies such as local authorities as well as other law enforcement agencies such as the Police and HM Revenue & Customs. Liaison and / or joint working will be conducted in accordance with established guidelines and protocols.

The investigating officer must not and will not accept any offer of repayment of monies or resignation at any stage during the investigation, however any such offers

will be noted and recorded on the investigation file and reported to the Chief Internal Auditor/responsible Director.

The Council has a right to suspend any employee involved pending the outcome of an investigation. Any such suspension, is, in the opinion of the Council, a neutral act and does not imply any guilt on behalf of the suspended employee. The suspension of an employee can, in some circumstances aid the speed in which an investigation can be conducted and serve to preserve vital evidence.

When suspects are not suspended, supervision of the employee will usually need to be increased and any manager should seek the advice of Human Resources and ICT on how this can best be accomplished.

Actions following the completion of an investigation

Upon the completion of an investigation, the investigating officer will report their findings in the first instance to the Corporate Fraud Manager and Chief Internal Auditor, who will in turn make the findings known to Human Resources, relevant Director or the Chief Executive

In the case of any monetary losses, a report will be given to the Council's insurance officer.

Should any control weaknesses be identified, the Director and relevant manager will be informed and remedies be actioned immediately. The Chief Internal Auditor / Internal Audit Unit will be able to provide advice and support regarding effective control mechanisms.

Should there be disciplinary issues identified as part of the investigation, a full report will be made to Human Resources who will work with the relevant Director and manager to decide what happens next. Should any course of action result in a disciplinary hearing, the investigating officer will (if required) make themselves available to give evidence at the hearing.

Although some organisations delay the bringing of any disciplinary action pending the outcome of any criminal prosecution, the Council will seek to deal with any disciplinary matters using the appropriate processes.

Should it be the case that criminal action presents itself as an option, this decision will be fully explored and subject to the Council's Fraud Prosecution Policy. Should fraud be proven, the Council will make every effort to recover any monetary losses. The method of doing so may vary depending on the type of loss and relevant legislation, however all options will be explored including civil court proceedings and in the case of criminal prosecution, proceedings brought under The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.