
Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy Summary

May 2024

Policy Statement

West Berkshire Council has a zero-tolerance stance to all forms of fraud, corruption and theft, both from within the Council and from external sources. We recognise fraud can:

- Undermine the standards of public service that the Council is attempting to achieve;
- Reduce the level of resources and services available for the residents of West Berkshire; and
- Result in major consequences which reduce public confidence in the Council.

1. Policy Summary

The Council promotes an 'anti-fraud' culture which highlights its zero tolerance to fraud, bribery, corruption, and theft. This is based upon five key pillars: **Govern, Acknowledge, Prevent, Pursue, and Protect**, as set out in "Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally 2020", which is supported by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Counter Fraud Centre, and the Local Government Association (LGA).

The Council will not tolerate fraud or corruption by its councillors, employees, suppliers, contractors, partners, or service users and will take all necessary steps to investigate all allegations of fraud or corruption and pursue sanctions available in each case, including disciplinary action, dismissal and/or prosecution. Wherever possible, the Council seeks to recover all proven financial losses.

The Council has full policies in place concerning Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Anti Money Laundering, & the Bribery Act. These are published on the Council's intranet, and Members and employees should familiarise themselves with them.

There is also a Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure which sets out how staff can raise concerns safe in the knowledge that they will not suffer any recrimination as a result, it also covers how a person outside of the Council can raise a concern. This sets out how concerns about fraud or other malpractice can be raised, and about how these are investigated.

The required ethical standards are included in both our Members Code of Conduct and Employees Code of Conduct, in addition to the Council's Constitution, including Financial and Contract Rules.

2. What is the Council doing to deal with fraud and corruption?

Good corporate governance procedures are a strong safeguard against fraud and corruption. The Council's Members, Directors and Management are ideally positioned to influence the ethical tone of the organisation and play a critical role in fostering a culture of high ethical standards and integrity.

Training is made available to Members and Officers to promote awareness of the possibility of fraud, corruption, bribery, money laundering, and theft, and to report any genuine concerns accordingly.

Members and Officers are aware of the need to make appropriate disclosures of gifts, hospitality and business.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that there are controls and mechanisms in place within their services to assess the risk of fraud, corruption, bribery, and theft, and to reduce these risks by implementing strong internal controls.

The Council has an Internal Audit service to deliver counter fraud activity which is appropriate to our needs, and provides recommendations to inform policy, system, risk management and control improvements, thereby reducing the Council's exposure to fraudulent activity. Internal Audit produce a counter fraud audit plan, and report on this annually to Members and senior managers.

We also take part in the Cabinet Office's National Fraud Initiative (NFI) which is a data matching exercise to help prevent and detect fraud nationwide.

3. What can you do if you suspect fraud or corruption taking place within the Council?

The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure is available to any individual (including staff, volunteers, contractors, service users and residents) to report their concerns.

Members of the public, along with Council employees are very important in the fight against fraud, theft, irregularity, bribery and corruption. If anyone believes that someone is obtaining services, from the Council, to which they are not entitled, it is very important that they report it to the Council. When reporting suspected fraud, theft, irregularity, bribery and corruption please be as specific as possible, the more detail we receive the greater the chance of a successful outcome.

4. Types of fraud often committed against local authorities

Social Care Fraud (personal budgets and direct payments): Overstatement of needs through false declaration, multiple claims across authorities, third party abuse by carer, family or organisation, posthumous continuation of claims.

Tenancy: Fraudulent applications for housing, subletting of the property.

Procurement: Tendering issues, split contracts, double invoicing.

Identity fraud: False identify or fictitious persons applying for services or payments.

Council tax: Discounts and exemptions, council tax support.

Blue badge: Use of fake or altered badges, use when disabled person is not in the vehicle, use of deceased person's badge.

Grants: Work not carried out, funds diverted, ineligibility not declared.

Business rates: Fraudulent applications for exemptions and reliefs, unlisted properties.

Insurance fraud: False claims including slips and trips.

Disabled facility grants: Fraudulent applications for adaptations.

Concessionary bus travel: Use of concession by ineligible person.

5. What if you've been a victim of fraud?

Finally, if you suspect you have personally been the target or victim of fraud or a scam you can **report it to Action Fraud** or call 0300 123 2040.