

Benefits Division Fraud Plan 2010/11



Background

Benefit fraud diverts money from the people who need help and puts an additional financial burden on every taxpayer.

Wigan Council is committed to tackling benefit fraud and resources a dedicated counter fraud team.

From 1 April 2009 to 28 February 2010 we prosecuted, cautioned or applied an Administrative Penalty on 175 customers.

This plan for 2010/11 sets out the:

- Aims and objectives of the Investigation function
- The responsibilities of key officers within the Benefits Service
- The role of investigation staff and our commitment to training
- How we raise fraud awareness throughout the council and in the wider community
- How we will prevent fraud from entering the system
- How we detect fraud
- How we deal with those people we find committing fraud

The plan will be reviewed annually.

Fraud Investigation Aims and Objectives

Stop fraudulent claims from entering the system

- Find any fraudulent claims already in the system
- Stop payments going to people who are not entitled to receive them
- Sanction those people who commit fraud
- Recover overpayments of benefit caused by fraud

- Deter people from trying to commit fraud
- Complement the aims and objectives of the council's other counter fraud strategies and policies
- ◆ Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement and Strategy
- ◆ Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy Whistle Blowing Policy

Responsibilities

Head of Benefit Services

Responsible for ensuring adequate resources are allocated to the prevention and detection of fraud.

Benefits Manager

Responsible for providing efficient and effective administration of the fraud investigation function.

Fraud Manager

Responsible for managing the fraud team in the most effective way to maximise the prevention and detection of housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud and to ensure effective joint working with key partners.

Staff Roles and Training

Aim - To encourage all members of the council and staff to report cases of suspected fraud and irregularity

- We will provide benefit fraud awareness for all benefits staff through training courses, leaflets and employee induction training and this will include delivering training to partners
- We will build links with and work with other organisations to tackle benefit fraud, making the best use of the resources available
- We will make fraud referral forms available to all staff
- We will promote the fraud hotline number throughout the authority
- We will promote fraud awareness in staff newsletters
- We will promote fraud awareness in publications issued to the residents of Wigan

- We will promote fraud awareness to members
- We will give feedback on referred cases detailing the results of the investigation

Prevention process

Aim - To ensure all claims are calculated correctly, based on legitimate details of each claimant's circumstances and supported by proper evidence

- We will ensure all persons who claim benefit submit at least two acceptable forms of identification.
- We will record proof of ownership of all national insurance numbers for all claimants and their partners.
- We will continue to verify evidence in accordance with the DWP Security best practice guide.
- We will ensure our claim forms and leaflets are clear and easy to understand.
- We will ensure our staff and the staff of partner organisations are properly trained to carry out their duties and have access to all relevant guidance and legislation.
- We will aim to check the accuracy of 4% of our benefit assessments – this is a locally set target in line with the requirements of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) good practice standards.
- We will use all available information to verify claims, prior to payment; to ensure that each person is entitled to the benefit claimed.

To ensure that entitlement to benefit continues to be paid correctly

- We will review claims in accordance with our intervention and review strategy.
- We will ensure sufficient evidence is produced by each claimant to verify continuing entitlement to benefit.

To find fraud quickly and effectively

- We will aim to sift all referrals and start an investigation within two weeks of receipt
- We will ensure our investigators are adequately experienced and trained.

- We will ensure our investigators have adequate resources and use those resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- We will refer suspected fraud cases to other organisations for investigation as appropriate.
- Through management checking we will ensure our investigators target their resources effectively to reduce the instance of fraud.
- We will keep adequate records of fraud referrals and investigations to enable risk analysis in the future to make sure we target high-risk areas.

We will further prevent fraud by:

- Participating in the Royal Mail do not redirect scheme.
- We will participate in the Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) and actively partake in other data matching exercises that become available to us.
- Undertake internal data matching.
- Carrying out internal Risk Assessments to target our resources.
- Resource a dedicated Fraud Investigation Team.
- Participating in a National fraud hotline in co -operation with other Greater Manchester local authorities.
- Providing deterrence to fraud through sanctioning offenders.
- Participating in the National Anti Fraud Network.
- Participating in the National Fraud Initiatives administered by the Audit Commission.

Detection

Aim - To detect and investigate fraud

- We will ensure staff are able to refer quality cases to the investigation team in a prompt manner.
- Investigators will work within procedures agreed with senior managers and audit.

- The Investigation team will professionally use any legislative powers to further their investigations.
- Investigators will work at all times within appropriate legislation and regulations.
- Cases will be prepared and offenders dealt with in accordance with human rights legislation.

Sanctions and deterrence

Aim - To ensure suitable actions are imposed on those found abusing the Benefits system

- We will set an annual target of sanctions to apply against those caught committing fraud. The target will be reviewed annually. The target for 2010/11 is 175 sanctions to be applied in accordance with the prosecution policy. The policy has been reviewed by Audit and Legal Services in March 2010.
- A target of 175 sanctions reflects an increase in performance during 2009/10 and balances this against a short term reduction in resources due to a temporary reduction in investigation resources due to maternity leave and resources needed to implement the new IT system.
- We will work with other partners to identify areas for joint working and record the outcomes. New links in 2009/10 were established with named contacts at Wigan and Leigh Area Housing Offices.
- Progress against targets will be reviewed monthly by the Benefits Manager and Fraud Manager.
- We will work within the guidelines of the prosecutions policy, which will be reviewed annually.
- We will prosecute as appropriate in accordance with the prosecutions policy.
- We will aim to maximise publicity for those cases prosecuted successfully by working in partnership with local newspapers.
- We will apply administrative penalties in accordance with the provisions of the prosecutions policy.
- Where appropriate, we will issue formal cautions in line with the provisions of the prosecutions policy

- We will maintain relevant statistics concerning the application of our prosecutions policy.

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