

Counter Fraud Progress Report 2025/26

Date: 18 March 2026

APPENDIX 1

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- A decorative graphic in the bottom-left corner of the page, consisting of a grid of triangles in various shades of blue and grey, creating a textured, geometric pattern.



Background

- 1 Fraud is a significant risk to the public sector. Fraud is the most common offence in the UK, accounting for 41% of all crime¹. The National Audit Office estimates that fraud and error cost the taxpayer between £55 and £81 billion in 2023/24 and that only a fraction of this was detected². Financial loss due to fraud can reduce a council's ability to support public services and cause reputational damage.
- 2 The Council engages Veritau to undertake counter fraud work on its behalf. We employ qualified criminal investigators to deliver a range of work that helps the authority prevent, detect, and deter fraud and related criminality. This includes officer training to help prevent fraud, proactive identification of issues through data matching exercises, and investigation of suspected fraud. To deter fraud, offenders face a range of outcomes, including prosecution in the most serious cases.
- 3 This report provides the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee with a summary of counter fraud activity undertaken by Veritau in 2025/26.



COUNTER FRAUD MANAGEMENT

- 4 Veritau has continued to provide fraud awareness training across Cherwell District Council. Training was presented to Corporate Leadership Team in November, and a further session is planned with the Executive Leadership Team to discuss further how the new offence of Failure to Prevent Fraud may present itself. All staff have a responsibility to be aware of fraud and report any suspicion to the fraud team.
- 5 Veritau provides information to all client councils including Cherwell District Council relating to International Fraud Awareness Week and the Anti-Corruption Day to raise awareness annually of the potential risks faced.
- 6 The National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) shares fraud alerts across the local government counter-fraud community. Veritau ensures relevant council departments receive this critical information. Recent alerts from NAFN have included mandate frauds where attempts have been made by fraudsters who impersonate trusted council suppliers with requests to divert payments to bank accounts controlled by them rather than the genuine accounts of suppliers.



MULTI-AGENCY WORK

¹ [Progress combatting fraud \(Forty-Third Report of Session 2022-23\)](#), Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, published March 2023.

² [An overview of the impact of fraud and error on public funds](#), National Audit Office, published November 2024.

- 7 As part of the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) arrangements for investigating Housing Benefit offences, the counter fraud team regularly responds to DWP information requests, known as LAIEFs. Since April 2025, the team has responded to 11 LAIEF requests.
- 8 Veritau's regular contact with the regional Department for Work (DWP) investigation team includes conducting joint investigations where state benefits and Council Tax Support are in effect. There is one joint working investigations ongoing.

INVESTIGATIVE WORK

- 9 The counter fraud team has received 117 referrals since 1 April 2025. These were received from sources including members of the public, council officers and data matching from the National Fraud Initiative (NFI).
- 10 Since 1 April, investigative work has identified £47,000 for recovery. This relates to Single Person Discount and Council Tax Reduction Scheme claims.
- 11 As part of these cases visits were conducted in November and December to residential properties where it was established that eight false claims for Single Person Discount had been obtained. Revised bills were issued and £6,000 has already been repaid.
- 12 Since 1 April 2025, 22 investigations have been completed. This includes three cases where warnings have been issued and 11 cases where overpayments have been identified.
- 13 There are currently 19 ongoing investigations which range from Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Single Person Discount, Business Rate, Housing and an internal case where there are concerns around overtime claims from a staff member.