

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Corporate Services

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee : 28 May 2008

Subject : Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to seek approval for our amended Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy for West Dunbartonshire Council (Appendix 1).

2. Background

- 2.1** West Dunbartonshire Council has a duty to administer claims for housing and council tax benefit, including a responsibility to detect and prevent fraud. The Council also has a duty to ensure that there is maximum uptake of benefit and that the correct amount of benefit is paid to those who are entitled to it.
- 2.2** To comply with recommendations made by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) the fraud strategy should receive Committee approval on an annual basis

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** This strategy fully supports the Council's aim to provide best value services which are free from fraud and corruption.
- 3.2** The Council has in place a network of systems and procedures to assist in detecting and dealing with fraud when it occurs. It is committed to ensuring that these systems keep pace with any future developments in techniques to both prevent and detect fraudulent activity in housing and council tax benefit.
- 3.3** The Council will maintain a continuous review of all these systems and procedures through the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Investigation Team and the strategy will be regularly reviewed.
- 3.4** The strategy has been amended to include reference to the Council's restructure which involves the movement of the Revenues Section in Housing, Environmental and Economic Services Department to the Finance & ICT Section on 3 September 2007.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** Since April 2006, due to a change in subsidy allocations, individual rewards will no longer be payable for successful sanctions applied. The Council will still receive subsidy for weekly incorrect benefit stopped. Local Authorities will now receive a single annual amount of funding paid on a monthly basis to cover housing benefit/council tax benefit administration, verification framework and fraud and error.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There was no requirement to carry out a risk analysis.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** Since October 2006 major changes in the working practices within the benefit investigation team have taken place. As well as working alongside the BFI and ensuring compliance with their recommendations and completion of the action plan following their focused inspection, the team is focused on an intelligence led approach to investigations with a view to conducting it to prosecutionable standard.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1** The Committee is invited to approve the attached housing and council tax benefit fraud strategy for West Dunbartonshire Council.

Joyce White
Executive Director of Corporate Services
Date: May 2008

Wards Affected:	All
Appendix:	Housing and Council Tax Benefit Fraud Strategy
Background Papers:	Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997
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