

## ANTI FRAUD, BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

### Introduction

1. The Borough of Spelthorne is committed to providing a high standard of service and accountability. An important aspect of this is a strategy which protects against fraud, bribery and corruption within the Council itself and from external sources.

In this context

Fraud means - the illicit gaining of cash or other benefit by deception; and

Corruption means - the dishonest influencing of actions and decisions.

Bribery means – the offering, giving or soliciting of an inducement or reward which may influence a person to perform a function or activity improperly.

2. The Council recognises that it is already subject to a high degree of external scrutiny of its affairs by a variety of parties. This includes the general public, Council Tax / Business Rates payers, service users, the Audit Commission, the Local Government Ombudsman, Central Government, in particular, HM Revenue and Customs, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions.
3. It also has external auditors who advise whether the Council has in place adequate arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud, bribery and corruption.
4. While this external scrutiny assists in protecting against fraud, bribery and corruption the Council believes a clear statement of its own strategy is needed.
5. The key elements of the Council's strategy to combat fraud, bribery and corruption are:
  - An open and honest culture
  - Adequate preventative measures
  - Systems for detection and investigation
  - Understanding and awareness within the Council and the adoption of a "whistleblowing" policy

### Culture

6. The Council expects Members and staff at all levels to behave with integrity and propriety and to act within the law and the regulations, procedures and practices laid down in relation to the conduct of the Council's business. The Council believes this is achieved best through the promotion of an atmosphere of honesty and openness.

7. The Council encourages Members and staff to raise any concerns they have about fraud, bribery and corruption immediately they occur. It will treat all concerns raised, seriously and in confidence.
8. The Council has three senior officers who have particular responsibility for regulating the conduct of the Council and its activities. These are:
 

Chief Finance Officer (currently Terry Collier)	Responsible for the financial management, audit and financial probity of the Council and also for its proper personnel policies and practices.
Monitoring Officer (currently Michael Graham)	Responsible for the legal probity and avoidance of maladministration or injustice by the Council.
Chief Executive (currently Roberto Tambini)	Responsible as Head of Paid Service for the overall management and direction of the Council and for ensuring adequate staff resources for services.
9. In addition each Head of Service has responsibility for the proper organisation and conduct of their service area.
10. Concerns should be raised with any of the above officers or with the Council's Internal Audit Manager Services Punita Talwar.
11. More detailed guidance and advice on how to raise any concerns is contained in the Council's whistleblowing policy.
12. If anyone feels they are unable to raise their concerns through any of the above routes they may contact 'Public Concern at Work' (0207 404 6609), a registered charity whose services are free and strictly confidential.

## **Prevention**

13. The adoption of proper and adequate measures to prevent fraud, bribery and corruption is the responsibility of Members, Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executives, Heads of Service and other managers. Preventative measures can be classified under two broad headings - Codes/Procedures and Systems.

### **1. Codes/Procedures**

All Members and staff need to be aware of, and have ready access to, the Council's agreed policies and procedures eg. Financial Regulations, Standing Orders, Codes of Conduct, and any relevant practice and procedure documents.

In particular staff must observe the Council's Code of Conduct for Staff (a copy of which is made available to all staff) and any relevant professional codes.

References will be taken up for all permanent and temporary staff to verify their suitability, honesty and integrity.

Members will in particular observe the Spelthorne code of conduct adopted on the 27 June 2012 and any other local Spelthorne code which may be adopted and will be supplied with a copy of any relevant code and advised of their responsibilities.

## **2. Systems**

The Council has and will maintain in place systems and procedures which incorporate internal controls, including adequate separation of duties to ensure that, as far as possible, errors, fraud, bribery and corruption are prevented.

The Chief Finance Officer has a statutory responsibility under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to ensure the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs. Financial procedures detail key financial systems and provide guidance which underpins the Council's Financial Regulations.

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executives, Heads of Service and managers are responsible for ensuring that appropriate internal controls are properly maintained.

A detailed analysis of the risks associated with any service should be carried out by managers (with assistance from Audit Services as necessary) to ensure that fraud, bribery and corruption is minimised.

### **Detection and investigation**

14. Concerns should be reported to one of the individuals referred to in paragraphs 8 to 10 above or in accordance with the Council's whistleblowing policy. A detailed investigation of any concerns raised will be undertaken with the assistance of the Council's Internal Audit Service.
15. The Council will deal with any instances of fraud or corruption swiftly. Disciplinary action will be taken if appropriate after the police have been informed/involved, and the relevant Cabinet Member informed where necessary. Where the Council has adopted a prosecution policy for any business area (eg Housing Benefit Fraud) this will be followed.
16. In the event that fraud is suspected on the part of contractors' employees or internally, by staff involved in agency or contract work on behalf of other bodies, procedures and responsibilities for reporting and initial investigation are the same as for staff. The Council will inform and involve employing contractors or agencies when appropriate.

17. Given the significance of benefit fraud in national and local statistics, the Council recognises the important role of its Benefit Fraud Investigation team in preventing and detecting benefit fraud. The Council will continue to support this function where working methods, resources and participation in national initiatives are under constant review.

### **Awareness**

18. The Council recognises the continuing effectiveness of the Anti Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy depends largely on the awareness and responsiveness of Members and staff. It is essential that both Members and staff are made aware of the strategy when they join the Council and receive a copy for inclusion in their personal records and, in addition, have ready access to all other relevant documents, policies and procedures which regulate the Council's activities. Action will be taken on a regular basis to remind both Members and staff of the importance the Council places on avoiding and preventing fraud and corruption.