

Report Title: Annual Report - Investigation & Enforcement Support Team

Introduction and Background

1. This report provides an update on the work of the Investigation and Enforcement Support Team within the Finance & IT Service for the annual year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
2. The Corporate Investigations Team was established following a centralisation of fraud for Revenues and Benefits. The team now works across the whole authority to support Services in areas that could attract fraud and develop processes for detection. The team have been successful in this over the years, working with Housing on identification and verification of the Right to Buy and Homelessness applicants and with the newly formed Environmental Crime Team supporting prosecutions, case management and fly tip investigations.
3. The Investigation Team has 6 full time equivalent staff consisting of; 1 Manager, 1 Senior Investigator, 1 Investigator and 1 Trainee Investigator, 1 Intelligence Officer, and 1 Trainee Intelligence Officer, both trainee posts are career grades.

Current Position

4. The costs of the investigation team is as follows:

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Direct costs (i.e. wages)	269,875
External grants and contributions	(78,040)
Indirect costs (i.e. payroll/legal)	<u>36,273</u>
Total cost	228,108

5. During 2021/22 the team, working in partnership with relevant Services, conduct various investigations. The also undertake a programme of innovative data matching campaigns to identify financial abuse, irregularity and fraud.

The overall financial value identified was **£687,632** of public funds.

This equated to **£459,226** of Ashford Borough Council funds.

The team are also active members of the Kent Intelligence Network (KIN) which is a network of all Kent Local Authorities including the County Council (Ben Lockwood is chair) Details of the county wide financial savings are attached.

Project Areas and Savings

6. The Investigations Team have worked partnership with the relevant services throughout the year to identify various financial savings following active investigations as follows;

Removal of Single Persons Council Tax Discount	£6,276
Amended Council Tax Liability	£63,577
Council Tax Fines	£210
Repaid Business Rate Grants (Covid)	£62,000

Small Business Rate Relief continued to be highlighted as an area of high financial risk and further reviews and investigations have taken place. This has attributed savings as follows;

Small Business Rate Relief Review	£12,085*
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*It must be noted that the above saving will be achieved year on year.

Business Rates is another high risk area for us. We identify Businesses' that have not registered, as well as properties that have undeclared holiday lets and are therefore not on the rating list. Additional income attributed is as follows;

Undeclared Business Rates	£302,424*
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*It can again be noted that this additional income will be year on year.

The team is working in partnership with our **Housing Team**, to safeguard our properties to ensure that only those with genuine entitlement are allocated Housing. Investigations into unlawful possession resulted in 5 properties being returned

Properties Returned for Use	£113,150
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The Council protects its 'Right to Buy Scheme', ensuring that only those entitled receive discounts. Successful 'Right to Buy' applications have been reduced annually by 30% since the team have been verifying the application process and one 'Right to Buy' application was refused and the asset retained.

Discount Refused	£80,900
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The Team, alongside Housing identify unlicensed Houses of Multiple Occupation resulting in a saving of;

HMO Licenses	£564
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7. Commercialisation – Extensive work has taken place to develop the team by commercialising the Investigation Service within Kent. The team have been successful in being awarded 2 one year contracts by neighbouring Authorities to investigate Social Housing Fraud on their behalf. The contracts have attracted an income of £32,000.

Conclusion

8. This has been a successful year for the team who have also secured 2 commercial contracts.

Future

9. The team are continuing with the commercial approach and are in discussions with 2 Housing Associations looking to develop contracts the next coming year.
10. Support for the data matching project the Golden Record System continues and we are looking to commence a pilot exercise in the coming year
11. The team are delighted to report that they are finalists in the Institute for Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) categories of Excellence in Counter Fraud and Excellence in Staff Education/Development.

Portfolio Holder's Views

12. These will be reported at the meeting.

Contact and Email

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