



City of Westminster

Audit and Performance Committee Report

Meeting:	Audit and Performance Committee
Date:	Wednesday 15 th July 2020
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Counter Fraud 2019/20 – End of year report
Wards Affected:	All
Financial Summary:	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Report of:	Gerald Almeroth, Executive Director of Finance and Resources
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Audit and Performance Committee's Terms of Reference require that the Committee receive reports on internal and external fraud investigated by the Council. This report is intended to brief members of the Committee in respect of work undertaken by the fraud service during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee notes the content of the report.
- 2.2 The Committee indicate any areas of the report that require further investigation.

3. Reasons for Decision

- 3.1 To inform Members of how the City Council is delivering its anti-fraud and corruption strategy.

4. Background

- 4.1 This report provides an account of counter-fraud related activity undertaken by the Corporate Anti-Fraud Service (CAFS) from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.
- 4.2 CAFS remains a shared service covering three Councils and continues to reap many benefits, including the sharing of skills and expertise, best practice and the streamlining of anti-fraud related policies and procedures.
- 4.3 CAFS continues to provide Westminster City Council with a full, professional counter fraud and investigation service for fraud attempted or committed against the Council.
- 4.4 For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, CAFS identified 221 positive outcomes, including 57 successful prosecutions and 43 recovered tenancies and stopped successions. Fraud identified has a notational value of over £900,000 and is detailed in the following table.

Activity	2018/19		2019/20	
	Fraud proved	Notional Values (£'s)	Fraud proved	Notional Values (£'s)
Housing application fraud	-	0	13	18,200
Right to Buy	38	56,780	21	23,300
Advisory Reports (pro-active)	4	11,392	12	25,500
Prevention subtotal	42	68,172	46	67,000
Tenancy Fraud (Council and Registered Providers)	24	207,350	43	434,500
Insider fraud	2	8,000	1	2,000
High/Medium risk fraud (e.g. NNDR, Procurement)	2	3,315	5	75,000
Low-risk fraud (e.g. Freedom passes, Council Tax SPD)	6	2,649	5	5,541
Disabled Parking	96	216,000	63	128,750
Resident's Parking	52	56,800	21	15,200
Detection subtotal	182	494,114	138	660,991
Proceeds of Crime (POCA)	6	64,112 <i>(repaid to date 48,900)</i>	4	96,710 <i>(repaid to date £70,925)</i>
NFI recovery	-	-	32	88,705
Press releases and publicity	1	3,150	1	2,000
Deterrence subtotal	7	67,262	37	187,415
Total	231	629,548	221	915,406

- 4.5 Between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, CAFS investigated 538 cases, including 381 new referrals, and concluded 375 investigations. A conclusion could mean a successful prosecution, successful prevention that stops fraud, a detection that identifies fraud and stops it continuing, an action that deters fraud, or no further action where there is no case to answer.
- 4.6 The table below shows this activity and details the fraud types that make up the closed cases, and the active caseload at the start of the current financial year.

Activity	Cases	Fraud types	Closed	Live
Live cases as at 01/04/19	157	Tenancy & Housing cases	173	92
New referrals received	381	Insider fraud	9	2
Closed investigations (Positive outcome 221)	375	Other Corporate	65	11
		Parking and Blue Badges	124	56
Live cases as at 01/04/20	163	POCA	4	2

- 4.7 Details of noteworthy activity and cases are reported in Appendix 1.

5. Whistleblowing

- 5.1 The Council's whistleblowing policy continues to be the primary support route for staff wishing to report a concern.
- 5.2 The whistleblowing policy was reviewed by People Services and CAFS, and the revised version along with a bespoke reporting line was launched in March 2020.
- 5.3 Since April 2019 one new referral was made via the whistleblowing process, but this was not deemed a qualifying disclosure and was resolved by People Services via the Council's formal grievance process.

6. Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy

- 6.1 The Council's Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy covering 2019/20 was based on three key themes: Acknowledge, Prevent and Pursue, and aligned with the National Strategy.
- 6.2 Emphasis was placed on the following anti-fraud activities:
- i. **Acknowledge:** recognising and understanding fraud risks and committing support and resource to tackling fraud to maintain a robust anti-fraud response.
 - ii. **Prevent:** preventing and detecting more fraud by making better use of information and technology, enhancing fraud controls and processes and developing a more effective anti-fraud culture.
 - iii. **Pursue:** punishing fraudsters and recovering losses by prioritising the use of civil sanctions, developing capability and capacity to investigate

fraudsters and developing a more collaborative and supportive law enforcement response.

7. Acknowledge

Maintain a robust anti-fraud response.

- 7.1 There are three critical elements of the operational plan that underpins and drives the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy, and CAFS refer to this as the *Fraud Resilience Triangle*. The triangle is formed of:
- 1) Fraud Risk Register (*Acknowledge*)
 - 2) Pro-Active Work Programme (*Prevent*)
 - 3) Reactive Referrals (*Pursue*)
- 7.2 CAFS continue to dedicate resources to pro-active operations which either review the fraud risk of a Council service, and informs the fraud risk register, or counter-fraud drives that detect, deter and disrupt fraud. For example, a series of tenancy checks on a large residential block or estate.
- 7.3 Combining pro-active work plans with reactive capability increase the chances of fraud detection but also acts as a robust preventative measure, especially if overt activities disrupt potential fraudsters.
- 7.4 Details of concluded risk reviews and pro-active counter fraud activity are reported in Appendix 1.

8. Prevent

- 8.1 In addition to the specialist investigative role, CAFS continue to provide advice and support to every aspect of the organisation including its partners and contractors.
- 8.2 Advice varies between fraud risk, fraud prevention and detection, money laundering and other criminal activity as well as misconduct and misuse of public funds. Some of the matters may progress to criminal investigation, but in all cases appropriate action, including disciplinary or recovery action, is taken.
- 8.3 This element along with the 'preventative – deterrent' nature of CAFS work is hard to quantify but where appropriate CAFS will highlight this activity within their reports to this Committee.

Corporate investigations

- 8.4 Corporate investigations cover a wide range of different counter-fraud activities including, but not limited to, financial investigations, complex third-party fraud

investigations, contractor or employee fraud, or actions and activities that contribute towards an effective assurance framework.

8.5 Since 1 April 2019 corporate investigation work has included:

- Business rate refund fraud was stopped, and the perpetrator was prosecuted following a fake refund application. At court the defendant entered a guilty plea to one charge of fraud by false representation. They received a six-month custodial sentence, suspended for 18-months, and ordered to undertake 200 hours of unpaid work.
- A false employment application was tendered for employment in the Council. It included fake references and false dates of previous employment as well as fictitious employers. Prosecution action commenced taking in to account various public interest factors, including the level of the dishonesty displayed in the application. The individual pleaded guilty to all offences at the first hearing and was sentenced to 16-weeks imprisonment suspended 12 months. They were ordered to undertake 100 hours of unpaid work and pay court costs of £415.
- CAFS investigated a personal budget case and found an individual who had misused his mother's direct payments, intended to pay for her care. He was sentenced to an 18 months Community Order including 200 hours of unpaid work. In sentencing the judge also ordered compensation, payable to the Council, for £9,580.
- A supplier provided conflicting information on New Vendor Forms and was suspected of overcharging. Investigative work included a review of invoices and verification that work had been completed. No fraud against WCC was found, but it raised concerns regarding other criminality, i.e. revenue offences. Referral made to appropriate law enforcement agency.
- National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) alert informed councils that fraudsters were targeting NNDR and Council Tax accounts with stolen credit/debit cards. The alert identified two suspects in Westminster and action was taken to prevent a possible £8,000 fraud.
- Dissemination of a Fraud Alert to Westminster schools highlighting the risks of potential spam emails that pretend to be from the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. The messages targeted schools during the summer holidays to request immediate payments from school funds.

Housing/Tenancy Fraud

8.6 CAFS provides an investigative service to all aspects of housing, including the verification of applications for housing support, as well as requests for the succession or assignment of tenancies. CAFS also investigate allegations of subletting or other forms of tenancy breaches as well as the checking of all right to buys.

8.7 For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, CAFS has successfully recovered 43 properties, including eight successions, that can now be allocated to a family in genuine need of assistance. CAFS also prevented thirteen cases where false housing applications were tendered or where individuals were no longer eligible for social housing and they were removed from the housing register.

8.8 Additionally, sixteen recoveries involved the return of keys and vacant possession without the need for lengthy and costly legal action and ensuring properties can be promptly reallocated.

8.9 Full details of all successful investigation activity regarding social housing is detailed in the table below, and noteworthy cases are reported in Appendix 1.

Landlord	Location	Postcode	Size (bedrooms)	Reason for recovery	Outcome
Council	Birch House	W10	1	Eligibility	Succession stopped
Council	Ellwood Court	W9	1	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Chaucer House	SW1V	3	Non-residence	Court possession
Council	Simpson House	NW8	1	False Application	Court possession
Council	Sixth Avenue	W10	3	False succession	Downsize property
Council	Darent House	NW8	studio	Subletting	Court possession
Council	Portnall Road	W9	1	Non-residence	Court possession
Council	Henry Wise House	SW1V	studio	Subletting	Court possession
Council	Crawford Buildings	W1H	1	Non-residence	Court possession
Council	Drakeland House	W9	1	Non-residence	Court possession
Peabody	Hanover Flats	W1K	1	Non-residence	Court possession
NHG	Star Street	W2	2	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Soho	Wardour House	W1F	1	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Westbourne House	SW1W	5	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Grove Road	RM17	3	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Blackstone House	SW1V	2	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Peabody	Peabody Avenue	SW1V	3	Non-residence	Court possession
Council	Kennet House	NW8	2	False succession	Succession stopped
Council	Westbourne Terrace	W2	studio	Subletting	Court possession
Network	Willow Place	SW1P	2	Subletting	Court possession
Council	Jessel House	SW1P	1	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Hughenden House	NW8	1	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Peabody	Balderton Flats	W1	2	Non-residence	Surrendered keys
Council	Ingrebourne House	NW8	3	False succession	Succession stopped
Council	Green Court	W1	1	Non-Residency	Court possession
Council	Vale Royal House	WC2	1	Non-Residency	Court possession
Council	Penn House	NW8	studio	Subletting	Court possession
Council	Reynolds House	SW1	3	Non-Residency	Court possession
Temp Acc	Westbourne Gardens	W2	3	Non-Residency	Keys returned
Council	Westbourne Terrace Road	W2	1	Subletting	Court possession
Council	Rogers House	SW1	1	Subletting	Court possession
Peabody	Peabody Avenue	SW1	3	Non-Residency	Keys returned
Council	Marlow House	W2	1	Non-Residency	Keys returned
Peabody	Chelsea Gardens	SW1	2	Subletting	Keys returned
Council	Chequers House	NW8	1	Non-Residency	Keys returned
Council	Kimble House	NW8	1	False succession	Succession stopped
Octavia	Whitfield House	NW8	2	Non-Residency	Court possession

Council	Scott Ellis Gardens	NW8	1	Non-Residency	Keys returned
Council	Scott Ellis Gardens	NW8	2	False succession	Succession stopped
Council	De Quincey House	SW1	1	False succession	Succession stopped
Council	Cameron House	NW8	1	False succession	Succession stopped
Council	Fourth Avenue	W10	1	False succession	Succession stopped
Soho	St James Residences	W1	1	Subletting	Keys returned

8.10 In liaison with housing management, a new network of Counter Fraud Champions launched. Each based in a different area office, they will help strengthen the fight against tenancy fraud.

8.11 Their priorities will include instilling an anti-fraud culture across housing management while working in close partnership with CAFS to raise the quality of fraud referrals and identify potential fraud risks.

Right to Buy (RTB)

8.12 CAFS apply an enhanced fraud prevention process to all new RTB applications, including anti-money laundering questionnaires as well as financial and residential verification.

8.13 For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, CAFS has successfully prevented twenty one Right to Buys from completion, where suspicion was raised as to the tenant's eligibility or financial status. In many instances, these have been as a result of the tenant voluntarily withdrawing their application once checking commenced.

8.14 The prevention work undertaken by CAFS in respect of RTB continues to protect valuable Council stock.

Parking investigations

8.15 CAFS continue to investigate the misuse of disabled parking badges, and for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 have successfully prosecuted 53 offenders. A further ten cases are currently lodged with the Council's solicitors awaiting court dates.

8.16 From the successful prosecutions secured to date, fines totalling £13,233 were imposed, and defendants ordered to pay the Council a total of £18,699 in costs and victim surcharges. The table below identifies the wards where offenders were unlawfully parking when apprehended.

Ward	Prosecutions
West End	31
Marylebone High Street	7
Bryanston & Dorset	6
Hyde Park	6
Church Street	2
Maida Vale	1

- 8.17 In addition to stopping misuse by drivers, CAFS also cancelled ten blue badges where the badge holder was not eligible to have received the badge.
- 8.18 CAFS also investigate the misuse of residents parking permits and any suspicious applications. For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 the team have successfully detected and taken appropriate action against 21 offenders.

9. Pursue

Deterrence

- 9.1 Stopping fraud and corruption from happening in the first place must be our primary aim. However, those who keep on trying may still succeed. It is, therefore, essential that a robust enforcement response is available to pursue fraudsters and deter others.

Sanctions

- 9.2 Criminal prosecutions are one of the strongest fraud deterrents due to the powers and sanctions of the criminal court, including confiscation, the threat of a custodial sentence and a criminal record. 9.3 For the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, CAFS has successfully prosecuted 57 offenders.
- 9.4 To deter fraud, the Council must also continue to publicise the successful outcomes of their investigations.
- 9.5 Last year CAFS reported on a successful tenancy fraud case that culminated in an unlawful profit order, in excess of £100,000, being awarded to the Council. Since then, the investigating officer has been asked to attend several national conferences to present a case study so that he techniques and actions in the case can be shared as best practice.
- 9.6 Additionally, the BBC have also filmed a short item on the same case which is due to be aired later this year.

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Local Government Access to Information Act – background papers used:
Case Management Information

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PRO-ACTIVE OPERATIONS

(1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020)

Source	Fraud Review	Details	Risk
<p>Risk Review</p>	<p>City Promotions, Events and Filming</p> <p>The objectives of the Fraud Risk Review are to understand the business processes and the prevalent fraud risks, review the existing anti-fraud controls and assess the overall fraud risk for inclusion in the Fraud Risk Register.</p> <p>The key risks identified included bribery and corruption and cash handling, but officers found these risks were mitigated through transparency, low-value transactions and no cash transactions.</p>	<p>City Promotions, Events and Filming, is a specific team within Policy, Performance and Communication directorate which has overall responsibility for managing applications from organisations and businesses seeking to stage events or to film in the City of Westminster. This is a not for profit service, with charges set to cover the cost of processing applications and providing any additional consultancy and assistance in planning an event to ensure that it is appropriate and can go ahead safely.</p> <p>There is limited financial risk as payment is required in advance for any application to be processed and deposits for park and open spaces are non-refundable so do not have to be returned if the event does not go ahead. Standard in-house debt recovery processes are followed for unpaid invoices.</p> <p>The risk of reputational damage to the Council is mitigated through the application process; all applicants are required to demonstrate awareness of health and safety and to conduct a risk assessment; have public liability insurance in place; consider the environmental impact and arrange for any litter to be removed.</p> <p>Active events and filming in the City of Westminster will be subject to monitoring by licensing officers and other enforcement agents of the Council where appropriate (e.g. environmental health, parking marshals etc.), as well as partner agencies. Consequently, there is no need for additional sample site visits by City Promotions, Events and Filming to ensure compliance.</p>	<p>Risk score reduced</p> <p>↓</p> <p>LOW = 2</p> <p>Impact = Low 2 [Low financial loss, low political risk with low media coverage; low reputational risk]</p> <p>Likelihood = Rare 1 [No fraud reported last three years; No known occurrences outside organisation]</p> <p><i>Previously: Low impact (2) and Low likelihood (2) = Low 4</i></p>

<p>Risk Review</p>	<p>Shared Service Fostering and Adoption Service</p> <p>The Shared Service Fostering and Adoption Service provides a range of temporary and permanent placements with Carers and adoptive families for children under the care of the local authority.</p> <p>CAFS review of this Service was prompted by a recent fraud case in Oxfordshire where a foster carer fraudulently obtained over £100,000 over a five-year period. In the scam the carer continued to pocket payments which was regularly paid to him and his partner for fostering children, despite the child having left the home.</p> <p>Although Internal Audit conducted an audit in April 2019, the purpose of this Risk Review was to focus solely on the detection and prevention controls.</p>	<p>Methodology: A meeting was arranged with the Head of Service to walk through processes and to discuss existing controls, especially those that would prevent a similar fraud from occurring.</p> <p>Findings: The Service undertakes monthly review meetings. This includes monthly meetings with Heads of Service and Finance, as well as an additional monthly meeting with Line Managers and Finance.</p> <p>These meetings enable a complete overview of all children who are currently in care and children who have moved. This review ensures the Service can identify potential overpayments that might arise due to changes in circumstance, and intervene accordingly.</p> <p>Foster carers are visited by the Service every four weeks.</p> <p>An Annual Financial Review of each special guardian or adopter ensures evidence of school reports, financial statements including proof of income/expenditure and proof of residency are seen. If this information is not provided within a month, payments are ceased.</p> <p>Conclusion: The review found that management had been alert to the risks of fraud and that they were taking appropriate actions to ensure that controls were in place to reduce overpayments and to prevent and detect fraud by carers and special guardians.</p>	<p>Fraud risk register</p> <p>Risk score</p> <p>MEDIUM = 9</p> <p>Impact = Medium 3 [Financial loss could reach £100k, political and reputational risk]</p> <p>Likelihood = Possible 3 [No occurrences in WCC, but known occurrences outside the organisation]</p>
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<p>Pro-active operations – tenancy fraud</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holcroft Court, Clipstone Street, London, W1 2. Hughenden House, Lisson Green Estate, NW8 3. Noel Coward House and Morgan House, Vauxhall Bridge Road, SW1 4. Tintern House, Pimlico, SW1 <p>Undertaking pro-active operations increase the chances of detecting fraud while providing assurance where compliance is verified.</p>	<p>Background: Targeting a block or estate for a series of unnotified visits and residency checks can be a high-impact method for detecting and deterring tenancy fraud.</p> <p>Methodology: Four separate operations covered five different blocks. The locations chosen were each associated with historical instances of tenancy fraud.</p> <p>Each exercise involved officers conducting unnotified visits to check and verify the residencies of <i>all</i> tenants in the blocks.</p> <p>The exercises involved unnotified visits to all properties, with additional follow up appointments including some notified where contact had been made following the initial residency check.</p> <p>The exercise verified the residency of all tenants, with four exceptions, and these remain subject of on-going investigations.</p> <p>Outcomes: Investigators verified residency at over 140 properties across five blocks. Having identified only four cases requiring additional investigation, they have obtained a high level of assurance that the subletting of Council properties in Holcroft Court, Hughenden House and Noel Coward House is not a significant risk.</p> <p>From the exercise, residents have also gained assurance that the Council take fraud seriously. Investigators remarked that the overwhelming feeling that tenants were glad the Council conducted checks and that if subletting was suspected they know how to alert the Council, thereby further raising fraud awareness amongst residents.</p>	<p>Pro-active operations</p>
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NOTEWORTHY INVESTIGATIONS AND ACTIVITY

(1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020)

	Case Description
1.	<p>TENANCY FRAUD - A referral from housing management raised concerns that the tenant may have abandoned a flat in Reynolds House, Erasmus Street, SW1.</p> <p>Visits to the property were unsuccessful, corroborating housing management's initial suspicions, although the property appeared to have someone living there. However, the investigation then discovered that the tenant had moved to Glasgow where he had obtained another social housing tenancy, but he never notified Westminster of the change.</p> <p>Financial checks suggested that the tenant's son was living in the flat while working in London at the Houses of Parliament. Officers then made contact with the son, who when challenged over the tenancy, and his right to be the sole resident, made an application to assign the tenancy from his father.</p> <p>This change was declined because the property had been previously succeeded when the tenant's wife passed away. Notices to quit were served.</p> <p>The son made no further challenged and surrendered the property. This three-bedroom property has now been allocated to a family in genuine need of support and assistance.</p>
2.	<p>TENANCY FRAUD - A referral from housing suggested the tenants of a shelter housing property in Hughenden House, NW8, had not been seen.</p> <p>The subsequent investigation found an Asian man at the property but no evidence of the tenants being resident. However, links to an alternative property were pursued, and the tenants found there.</p> <p>Investigators were unable to find evidence of rental payments that would have fully proved subletting. When confronted, the tenants initially agreed to relinquish the tenancy, but then changed their minds and challenged the repossession order. However, when they eventually received a summons with a court date, they surrendered the keys and agreed to a repayment plan to clear rent arrears that had built up.</p> <p>This one-bedroom property has now been allocated to someone in genuine need of sheltered accommodation, support and assistance.</p>

3.

TENANCY and RIGHT TO BUY - During the verification process of a right to buy (RTB) application for a property in Lenthall House on the Churchill Gardens Estate, the tenant was found to be linked to alternative addresses. Because of this, the matter was referred for further investigation.

Initial enquiries discovered that the tenant first applied to Westminster City Council in 2005. He was living with his parents at the time of the application and placed on the Council waiting list.

In 2010, while living with his parents, he purchased a property in Thamesmead. However, he never told the Council about any change of circumstances and remained on the waiting list.

The following year, 2011, he was nominated for a Council tenancy on Churchill Gardens Estate and accepted the property in Lenthall House. He signed a tenancy agreement but still failed to inform the Council he had purchased a property in Thamesmead.

Further investigation also revealed that shortly after signing the tenancy agreement he started subletting the Lenthall House property for a monthly rent of £550 and continued to do so for twelve months. After that, he also sublet the address from March 2013 to August 2013 and from May 2014 to August 2015 receiving rent amounts totalling £4,750. He also collected rent from January 2015 to November 2016, totalling £10,489.

During this time, our enquiries suggested that the tenant remained at home with his parents while subletting his Council property, and the Thamesmead address. However, the investigator found him linked to further addresses, and it transpired that during this time, he had purchased another two properties in Enfield and Tottenham.

Given the findings, the tenant was invited to attend an interview under caution in April 2017. During the meeting, he advised that he did recall completing a housing application but believed he did declare property ownership. He also maintained that he still lived at Lenthall House and had never sublet the property. The only person that had ever stayed at the property was his partner.

When officers challenged him on his failure to declare property ownership on his RTB applications, he stated that it must have been an error as he owned five properties. When he was then asked about rental payments, he was unable to offer a plausible explanation as to their existence on his bank statements. Instead, he continually maintained that he was unaware that he had an obligation to inform the housing service of any changes in circumstances.

After the interview, the matter was passed to the Council's Legal Services, and he was summonsed to attend Woolwich Crown Court charged with both illegal subletting and a false RTB application. He pleaded guilty to all four charges.

The judge granted the Council compensation of £85,000 plus costs of £17,500 but deferred the sentencing to November 2019 to allow the defendant time to repay the debt. On 8 November 2019, the deficit was repaid in full, and he was sentenced to nine months imprisonment suspended for two years.

<p>4.</p>	<p>BLUE BADGE - During a routine inspection of Blue Badges in Vere Street, W1, our investigator observed a grey Toyota RAV4 park on one of the five designated bays. The female driver placed a badge on display in the windscreen before exiting the vehicle.</p> <p>The investigator approached the driver and introduced himself. He inspected the badge which was issued by the London Borough of Camden, to a male badge holder, a child.</p> <p>The investigator asked the driver for an explanation, and she said that it was her son's badge and that she had just dropped him off, with her daughter, at the shop in Oxford Street, Zara.</p> <p>The investigator cautioned her and then challenged her account of events. In particular, he raised the issue that passenger vehicles were not allowed along Oxford Street at this time of day. In reply, she confirmed that the badge holder, her son, was at home. She said this was the first time she had used the badge on her own, understood it was wrong, but that she was returning goods to Zara and buying her son some clothes.</p> <p>On 30 October 2019 at Westminster Magistrates the defendant failed to attend. The judge granted an application to proceed in her absence and found the offence proven. The defendant was fined £400 and ordered to pay costs £410—all to be paid to the court within 14 days.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>TENANCY FRAUD - A case was referred by Peabody Housing Association who had received anonymous allegations regarding the tenant of a property in Brown Hart Gardens, W1. The tip-off suggested that the tenant and his husband had obtained housing fraudulently.</p> <p>Initial enquiries, including a visit to the property, found no discrepancies. The tenant was in the property although he explained that due to his work commitments, he travels throughout the UK often staying away from the address.</p> <p>The case was about to be closed when the investigator found the original homeless application submitted by the tenant. The form included medical documents which were tendered as proof of illness and thereby evidenced his need for support and assistance. These documents did not appear genuine, and enquiries with the hospital confirmed that they were fake.</p> <p>Additionally, these enquiries generated a new residential address linked to the tenant, and it transpired that he was the owner of this property in Southwark.</p> <p>The tenant was contacted again to arrange an interview, but this must have alerted him to our further enquiries, and he relinquished the two-bedroom property forthwith.</p> <p>Consideration for criminal action was discussed with the Housing Association, but they did not want to pursue the matter further or delay the recovery of the property.</p>

6.	<p>SUCCESSION – Housing Solution Services referred a case following a suspicious succession application at Ingrebourne House.</p> <p>When a council tenant dies, the secure tenancy can pass to a family member. This is called succession, and the person who applies for a succession must show they have lived at the address twelve months before the date of death.</p> <p>CAFS initial enquiries found that the former tenant was in receipt of a Single Person Discount at the address and was in receipt of benefit as the sole occupant, both of which suggested the succession applicant had proved false information.</p> <p>A more in-depth check on the succession applicant found that she was linked to Leeds, and further enquiries with Leeds City Council revealed the applicant was resident in Yorkshire at a time when she was meant to be living in Ingrebourne House. It also showed when she left Leeds to move to Westminster, and this was after the death of the tenant.</p> <p>The findings were presented to Housing Solutions, who served a notice to quit (NTQ). However, the tenant failed to leave the property once the NTQ expired, and a court date was scheduled. Following a short, successful hearing the Council were awarded an outright possession order, and the occupant finally vacated this three-bedroom property in October 2019.</p>
7.	<p>TENANCY FRAUD – The family members of an elderly resident from Vale Royal House, WC2, approached the housing department and tried to engage officers to make a financial offer to their relative in exchange for the one-bedroom property being relinquished. They mention significant amounts, including £30,000.</p> <p>The encounter raised suspicions, and the details were referred to CAFS.</p> <p>The subsequent investigation discovered that the tenant had left the UK in 2016 and had been living in Malta ever since. This raised questions as to who was living there, however, visits to the address were unsuccessful.</p> <p>Contact details for the family were traced, and contact made asking for clarity regarding the address and the tenant. They were asked to relinquish the property but refused.</p> <p>CAFS recommended that a notice be served on the address, and this notice to quit the property was unchallenged. The eviction and repossession of the property took place in November 2019.</p>

<p>8.</p>	<p>TENANCY FRAUD - The housing team were conducting a tenancy check on a property in Jessel House, Page Street, SW1, when they found a young female at the address; The tenant was a single male. The female said she had been renting the flat and named the tenant as her landlord. She appeared shocked to find out it was a council property.</p> <p>The matter was referred to CAFS, and initial checks linked the tenant to his mother's address, and, when added to the information obtained from the initial visit, a notice to quit the property was immediately issued.</p> <p>The tenant was invited to attend an interview under caution, but this was cancelled due to an incident at council offices which rendered meeting rooms inaccessible. Instead, officers were able to have an informal discussion with him and his sister, who was in attendance. It was apparent that his sister was attending as his appropriate adult due to his learning disabilities, and this changed the process officers needed to follow.</p> <p>A new interview date was arranged and his appropriate adult informed of the details. However, once the letter was sent, the housing officer contacted the CAFS to confirm that the tenant had surrendered the flat and returned the keys.</p> <p>No further action was considered due to the tenant's capacity, and the prompt return of vacant possession.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>TENANCY FRAUD – CAFS received an allegation from Housing that the tenant wasn't living in his sheltered accommodation on the Lisson Green Estate. Officers had already met with the tenant and his daughter. His daughter had said that he did live at the flat but spent some time with her.</p> <p>Checks showed he was living at his daughter's house in Walthamstow. A visit to the Walthamstow address found him and his wife living there as well. The daughter wasn't present when investigators attended, but later the same day the daughter rang to say they would give the flat back.</p> <p>Officers revisited them all in Walthamstow where the tenant signed the relinquishment form and gave the keys back.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>BLUE BADGE – Investigators discovered a male driver misusing his mother's disabled badge to obtain free parking near Selfridges Department Store. At the time he stated that she was shopping in Selfridges. The officer asked to accompany him to Selfridges to verify his explanation as he attempted to contact his mother to arrange this meeting. However, while officers were interviewing him, he received a call from his mother saying she was actually in Edgware Road.</p> <p>The Council undertook prosecution action against the driver, and the matter was heard at Westminster Magistrates Court on 5 February 2020. The driver did not attend but was found guilty in his absence. He was fined £450 and ordered to pay costs £410.</p>

<p>11.</p>	<p>BLUE BADGE - During a routine inspection of Blue Badges in Wigmore Street, W1, our investigator observed a female driver park in a designated disabled bay. The female driver placed a badge on display in the windscreen before exiting the vehicle.</p> <p>When our investigator asked to see the badge, she said that she had dropped the badge holder off close by in Wigmore Street and was going back to pick him up as he struggled to walk. However, after being further challenged as to the badge holder's whereabouts, she declared that she was not going to pick up her partner, and that she had parked up to buy a dress for her daughter.</p> <p>Given the above, the Council prosecuted her misuse of the disabled badge under section 117(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.</p> <p>The matter was heard on 5 February 2020 by District Judge Blake at Westminster Magistrates Court. The driver did not attend but submitted a written guilty plea. She was fined £150 and ordered to pay costs of £150.</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>TENANCY FRAUD – An anonymous tip-off claimed that the tenant of a one-bedroom flat in Rogers House, SW1, accepted a cash payment from an unknown third party to add them onto his tenancy. At the same time, he had left the country and was now living overseas.</p> <p>Background checks suggested the tenant had left the country, and financial enquiries showed numerous unidentified payments into the tenant's bank account, several of which were merely narrated "friend", and due to the amounts and frequency appeared to be rental payments.</p> <p>CAFS investigators attempted to make numerous visits to the property to verify who was there. Unfortunately, while officers got the impression that there was someone in the flat, the door was never answered. Instead, officers finally left a letter arranging a notified visit. The tenant soon made contact to say he wasn't currently in the country as he had contracted a tropical disease overseas. He was unsure what the condition was, but when he was well enough to travel, he would contact the officers on his return to the UK.</p> <p>A few weeks later the tenant contacted investigators to say he no longer wanted to live at Rogers House. However, when invited to discuss the matter with investigators, he refused. Notices to quit were served, but rather than relinquishing the tenancy the tenant refused to do so. He continued to decline to attend any interviews.</p> <p>The matter progressed to court, and, supported by the evidence gathered by CAFS, possession was finally obtained, and the tenant was evicted in December 2019.</p>

13.	<p>HOUSING – A positive data match from the National Fraud Initiative linked data between Westminster City Council's waiting list and Derby City Council. It suggested that a person on the Westminster's housing listed had now found permanent accommodation elsewhere.</p> <p>An investigation of the Westminster data showed that a male had been registered on the Council's housing waiting list at Falkirk House in Maida Vale. His application said that he was in privately rented studio accommodation and claimed that it had become overcrowded when his wife and children joined him in the UK.</p> <p>The checks with Derby City Council revealed that the applicant is now resident in their authority where he held an assured tenancy. He was immediately removed from the waiting list and his file closed.</p>
14.	<p>SUCCESSION – A new succession claim suggested that the applicant was the niece of a deceased tenant in Kimble House, NW8, and claimed to be resident at the property before his death.</p> <p>Investigations showed that she spent a lot of time living at another address with her brother. The investigation also revealed she was not a direct family member of the deceased tenant and therefore failed the succession criteria.</p> <p>Even when confronted with the facts, the female did not want to move out and fought the Council's decision.</p> <p>The matter progressed to court, but when faced with the overwhelming evidence, it didn't take long for the judge to award possession to the Council, after which the applicant vacated the property and returned the keys immediately.</p>