To:	**Audit & Governance Committee**
Date:	7 July 2026
Report of:	Interim Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer)
Title of Report:	Counter Fraud Team Annual Report 2026-2027

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To note the activity and performance of the Counter Fraud Team for the fiscal year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Tuner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Priority:	Well-run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Audit and Governance Committee resolve to:
1. **Note** the contents of the report.

Information Exempt from Publication
The information contained within Appendix 1 is exempt from publication under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Internal Investigations	Yes The information contained within the appendix is exempted from publication under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that: • The information is likely to reveal the identity of an individual (paragraph 1 • The information relates to action taken in connection with the

		prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime (paragraph 5)

Introduction and background

1. The remit of the Counter Fraud Team (the Team) is to tackle fraud and financial irregularity across the Council, aligned to the services' fraud risks and the priorities as identified in the Council's Organisational Fraud Risk Assessment (most recently updated in 2019), as well as by the previous Audit Commission and CIPFA's Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy (FFCL) 2020 (as updated).
2. The aims and objectives of the Team are to provide high quality professional corporate fraud investigation services to the Council; to prevent and detect fraud and error within the Council and to partner organisations on a commercial basis; and to assist cross border agencies where possible. Through this activity, the Team prevents financial losses, identifies additional revenue for recovery, generates income through service delivery, and seeks redress in both civil and criminal cases.

Performance 2025/26

3. For 2025/26, there were five Service Performance Indicators used to track performance on a monthly basis. The Team was responsible for achieving fraud prevention, detection and identification values in excess of £2.5 million in the period. Performance against these targets is shown in the table below.

Table 1 - Investigations Team Performance from 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026			
Measure	**Annual Target**	**Total Achieved**	**Comment**
Number of social housing properties recovered.	8	10	10 properties identified by the Team and recovered by the Council as a result of misuse, which includes sub-letting, non-occupation and unlawful succession.
Number of applications for social housing stopped.	25	5	The majority of identified cases (116) were pending cancellation at year end and will be reflected in 2026/27 performance reporting.
Achieve cost neutrality from identification of revenue through	£300,000	£513,867	See Table 2 for breakdown. 171% of target achieved; see Section 5 for detail.

investigation activity			
Prevent financial losses to the Council through investigation activity	£1,300,000	£2,069,151	159% of target achieved. See Table 2 for breakdown.
Trading Income from commercial activity	£240,000	£266,713	111% of target achieved.

4. Table 2 below provides a breakdown of the income recovered or generated, and losses prevented by the Team.

Table 2 – Income generated and losses prevented from 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026			
	Income Generated	**Loss Avoidance**	**Comment**
	£	**£**	
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	13,912	6,751	The loss avoided is based on the revised Oxford model calculation of 104 weeks future entitlement.
Housing Benefit	22,283		Although no longer tasked with investigating Housing Benefit fraud, these values are the by-product of tenancy fraud and Council Tax Reduction Scheme investigations conducted by the Team. No future savings as customers returned from abroad to reclaim HB.
Right to Buy		1,702,400	20 Right to Buy applications prevented following investigation (comprising 16 pre-November 2024 cases and 4 post-November 2024 cases based on revised discount thresholds)
Council Tax Discount / Exemption adjustments	7,721		Achieved through investigation casework.
Loss avoidance from Council-owned properties recovered (subletting / non-occupation / unlawful succession)		240,000	Calculated using the equivalent cost of keeping a family in temporary accommodation for one year if the properties were not recovered (£24k x 10 properties)

Housing Applications		120,000	5 General Register Housing Applications stopped through data matching & investigation activity preventing temporary accommodation costs or property allocation - £24,000 per instance. Calculated using the equivalent cost of keeping a family in temporary accommodation for one year calculated if the properties were not recovered
Non-Domestic Rates	446,067		Data-led review of Retail, Hospitality & Leisure Relief discount to identify breaches of Cash Cap rules, removing discounts where breaches occurred
Regulatory Enforcement Penalty (Housing Act)	23,884		Located HMO licence breach offender through use of Financial Investigator Powers enabling recovery
Totals	**513,867**	**2,069,151**	**2,583,018**
Trading income from commercial activity	266,713	-	
Total income and fraud loss avoidance	**780,580**	**2,069,151**	**2,849,731**

5. The Team hosted its tenth Oxford Annual Fraud Conference on 20th November 2025. With more than 300 in attendance, the aim of the event was to help raise awareness of fraud trends and emerging risks to attending organisations and raise awareness of the services that the Team can offer. The Team is known to other organisations in a commercial capacity as the Oxford Investigation Service.
6. The event has remained a free-to-attend conference for delegates with the costs not only being entirely covered through exhibitor charging and sponsorship, but deriving a surplus which will be used by the Council to contribute towards overheads and to fund future counter fraud initiatives.
7. Based on the ongoing success of the conference, the overwhelming positive feedback received and the reputation of the event as “essential-to-attend” for those in the profession, as well as the forming of new business relationships with partner organisations, the Team remains committed to hosting the event. However, 2026 will see the Team break from annual delivery with the next event scheduled for November 2027.
8. In July 2025, the Team were shortlisted as Finalists in the category of Excellence in Protecting the Public Purse, which is part of the IRRV’s prestigious Performance

Awards scheme. In October, it was announced that the Team had received a Highly Commended award within the category.

Internal Investigations

9. **Appendix 1** details staff / internal investigations involving the Counter-Fraud Team in the period.

Commercial Activity

10. The Team continues to provide counter-fraud and investigation services externally to multiple partner organisations. Business development activities are part of the Team's culture with each team member contributing to ongoing client cultivation.
11. Known externally as Oxford Investigation Service, the Team engages in a range of marketing and promotional activities to assist business development objectives. This includes speaking at relevant conferences, exhibiting with a bespoke trade stand at events, mailshots and social media updates.
12. A notable new client contract was established in the year with Arun District Council. Oxford Investigation Service is now the sole supplier of Counter-Fraud services for a three-year period, through to October 2028.
13. In 2019, the Team formed a shared service arrangement with the Counter Fraud Team of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. The teams have called upon each other's specialisms and resources when needed since formation, and the financial year 2025/26 was no exception. Various initiatives took place across the year involving officers from both organisations working together.

Alternative Options Considered

14. No alternative options have been considered. This report provides a retrospective summary of service activity and performance for the financial year and is presented for information

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

15. The Council is expected to be abolished as part of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), with new unitary authorities anticipated from April 2028. While the formal 'minded to' decision from the Government had not been confirmed at the time of drafting, it is recognised that the Counter Fraud Team will be subject to significant structural and operational change. The Counter Fraud Manager is actively contributing to LGR workstreams to help shape the Team's future operating model, ensure continuity of counter-fraud provision, and safeguard existing commercial arrangements

Other implications

16. There are no consultation, health and safety, human resources, sustainability, environmental or crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Financial implications

17. The Team continues to prevent and detect fraud and financial irregularity, first and foremost, for the Council. The Team has continued to engage in innovative and proactive initiatives, ensuring the continued delivery of a robust counter fraud service. The value of prevented fraud losses, additional revenue identified as well as income from external trading was £2,849,731 in the financial year 2025-2026.
18. Contractual agreements devised for joint working with other organisations have been reviewed and approved by Financial Services for compliance with financial regulations and economic feasibility.

Legal issues

19. There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.
20. The work of the Team ensures compliance with the Council’s Avoiding Bribery, Fraud and Corruption, Whistle-Blowing and Anti-Money Laundering policies and procedures as well as the Bribery Act 2010, the Money Laundering Regulations 2007 and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. It also mitigates against legal and reputational risks to the Council.
21. All data sharing, both internally and externally, is covered by data sharing protocols and Agreements and is conducted in the interests of prevention and detection of fraud, crime and other financial irregularity, in accordance with the provisions and exemptions of the General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018.
22. The Council has relied upon its powers under Section 1 of the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970 (the “1970 Act”) to provide services to other local authorities and public bodies. (EG/13715/040626)

Level of risk

23. Low to Medium. Operational risks relating to fraud exposure are actively managed through periodic risk assessments and established control measures. Strategic risks associated with Local Government Reorganisation and service transition are recognised and are being monitored through corporate governance arrangements.

Equalities impact

24. The Council continues to have due regard to its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). Counter fraud activity is applied equitably and proportionately, ensuring that investigative practices, data use and service delivery do not disadvantage any protected group.

Report author	Scott Warner
Job title	Counter Fraud Manager
Service area or department	Counter Fraud Team (Financial Services)
Telephone	0755 728 8693
e-mail	swarner@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers: None