

Local Members Interest
N/A

Audit & Standards Committee – 26 October 2021

National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2020 - Update

Recommendation

1. I recommend that:
 - a) Members note the progress made to date on investigating the data matches received from the Cabinet Office in January 2021 as part of the 2020 National Fraud Initiative ('NFI') exercise.

Report of the County Treasurer

Background

2. The NFI is a data matching exercise, designed to help participating bodies to detect and deter fraudulent and erroneous payments. It began in 1996 and is run every two years. It compares information held by and between approximately 1,200 organisations including Councils, police forces, NHS establishments and private companies. The core of the NFI is the matching of data to help reduce levels of housing benefit fraud, occupational pension fraud and tenancy fraud. The most recently completed exercise (2018) resulted in the detection (nationally) of £245 million of fraud and error across the UK bringing a total to date over two decades of £1.93 billion.
3. The NFI data matching exercise involves Staffordshire County Council (the 'Council') submitting the following data sets to the Cabinet Office for matching against relevant data from other participating organisations, including the Department for Work and Pensions (the 'DWP').
4. Data sets submitted by or on behalf of the Council were:
 - a. Payroll
 - b. Pensions
 - c. Creditors & creditor payments
 - d. Blue badge holders
 - e. Concessionary travel passes
5. In previous exercises of the NFI, the data sets have also included Council funded private residential care home residents and Personal Budget recipients. These were excluded by the Cabinet Office for 2020 following a review of the National Health Service Act 2006 identifying these as being defined as patient data, and their inclusion being determined as outside the remit of the NFI.

6. In lieu of the omission of these data sets from the NFI, Internal Audit are currently working on a pilot exercise as part of the Council's Counter fraud Workplan, which involves matching "tell us once" data against residential care home residents and personal budget recipients. Whilst the "tell us once" data may not be as comprehensive as the DWP deceased persons data, this exercise is intended to partially mitigate the gap left by the exclusion of these data sets from the NFI in 2020.
7. The data used in the NFI was produced in early October 2020. The Payroll, and Pensions data sets covered the period from April 2020 to September 2020. Blue Badge, and Concessionary Travel Pass data sets comprised extracts as at 30 September 2020. Creditor data covered the period 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2020.
8. It should be noted that individuals whose data was to be included in the exercise were notified prior to the commencement of the 2020 exercise. This was in line with NFI guidance to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018).
9. Further details of the types of data matches carried out as part of the NFI and the number of potential data matches returned, together with the progress made to date in investigating these are included at **Appendix 1**.
10. The exercise to date has identified total confirmed overpayments of £2,287 to date.
11. A summary of recovered funds and anticipated recoveries is detailed below. Potential duplicate creditor payments have been identified, however at the time of reporting, Internal Audit are seeking confirmation from budget holders prior to categorising these as requiring recovery.

Match Type	Recovered to Date	No. of Cases	Further Overpayments Identified and Recovery On-going	No. of Cases
Duplicate records by creditor name, supplier invoice number and invoice amount but different creditor reference (710)	£989	1	£1,298	2
Total	£989	1	£1,298	2

All outstanding overpayments continue to be actively pursued by the Council.

12. It is anticipated that the results processing will be completed by the end of March 2022 and will be reported to a future meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee.
13. In addition to the tangible benefits identified above, during the course of reviewing the matches Internal Audit will consult with colleagues across the organisation. It is anticipated that this will heighten awareness of the NFI and act as a fraud deterrence.

Equalities Implications

14. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

15. Participation in the 2020 data matching exercise was mandatory under part 6 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

16. The Cabinet Office fee for participating in the exercise is £3,800 excluding VAT. With the NFI exercise running over a period of two financial years, the Authority is invoiced in two equal annual instalments. Internal Audit has also allocated 20 days within the internal audit plan 2021-22 to carry out the investigations in relation to the potential data matches.

Risk Implications

17. Work supports the strategic risks identified by the Authority.

Climate Change Implications

18. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

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List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Cabinet Office National Fraud Initiative Report July 2020
National Fraud Initiative Code of Data Matching Data Matching Practice.

Appendix 1 – National Fraud Initiative 2020 – Summary of Matches by Group Type (as at 7 October 2021)