

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides the Audit Committee with a summary of the arrangements for the transfer of existing Housing Benefit Fraud investigation Services to the DWP. The programme of rollout has started already and is due to finalise by March 2016.
- 1.2 As part of the Governments ongoing commitment to welfare reform the concept of a Single Fraud Investigation Service for the examination and review of all welfare related benefits has been developed with a series of 'pilot' authorities in various parts of the country being established. Following the early success of these pilots the DWP wrote to all Local Authorities in March 2014 setting out the approach to the transfer of Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation teams advising that the process would be outlined in a paper setting out the manner of the transfer, employment rights and clarity about how the scheme would be rolled out.
- 1.3 Each authority was asked to complete a questionnaire of 31 key questions covering resource and performance statistics and the percentage of posts that worked exclusively on Welfare related investigations as against Corporate Fraud work. A copy of our return is attached as Appendix B2.
- 1.4 The return would give the DWP an initial indication of work load and resources on which to base their statistics and likely transfer of resource to them.
- 1.5 On 31 March 2014 a 'Roadshow' was organised by the DWP to provide some more detail on the transfer of resource issue and each authority was requested to send up to two representatives from the Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Service, one to be an operational investigator. The DWP intend to undertake such events across the country and each roadshow would be represented by a cross section of authorities.

3. CONSULTATION WITH HR

- 3.1 All information associated with this transfer has been communicated to the Head of HR who has informed Staff Side as part of ongoing communications. Legal Services have been kept informed from an Employment Law perspective. It is likely that local negotiations will take place with each Local Authority where those identified to be in scope have specific issues to resolve such as access to a local DWP site for future work or where special arrangements such as Travel Allowances, Parking Permits and other unique benefits apply.

- 3.2 The DWP have advised the council that we will transfer to them in February 2016 thus making us one of the very last London authorities to transfer. This creates some opportunity to examine our resources going forward and we have continued to set challenging targets for this financial year on a 'business as usual' basis.

4 RESOURCES GOING FORWARD

- 4.1 There will be areas of Fraud investigation which are currently 'by products' of Housing Benefit Fraud Investigations that will require consideration for future resourcing. These include Parking Permit abuse, Council Tax Investigations- CT Reduction Scheme, Single Person Discount Investigation and Student status discount.
- 4.2 It is proposed to submit a detailed paper of resource requirements for emerging and residual work in the near future when further clarity of what resources are determined to be in scope are clarified by the DWP.