

Fraud investigation identifies dead people on housing waiting list

Dozens of dead people were identified as still being on a council house waiting list with nearly 100 more holding blue badges during a fraud investigation.

East Lothian Council employed a counter fraud officer last year as part of a new shared service agreement with neighbouring Midlothian Council and a report on their first 12 months of work has revealed errors which will save the council more than £665,000 have been uncovered.

They include identifying people on council lists who have died and those receiving single person discounts on their council tax who are no longer living alone.

The report was due to be discussed at a meeting of the council's audit and governance committee today but it had to be cancelled after not enough elected members attended to make it quorate.

It revealed the new officer had worked with the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) a data matching service, which brings together information from council and other public sector bodies comparing them to flag up any possible fraud cases.

It matches data including dates of birth, National Insurance numbers and addresses along with benefits details and blue

badge holders.

Of the core 83 reports received from the data matching work 77 have been fully investigated with 2,151 matches.

The report said: "From these core matches the following areas of error were identified: 50 deceased individuals were removed from the housing waiting list with NFI estimated savings of £214,150; 96 deceased individuals had Blue Badges cancelled with NFI estimated savings of £62,400; 5 duplicate invoice payments that had not already been returned were identified with a recovery of £48,999 that has now been received back by the council."

The counter fraud officers also introduced a process for reviewing households receiving single person discounts which may no longer qualify.

It revealed that household were written to and asked to confirm their status with a final reminder sent to those who do not respond and the discount removed if they ignore it.

The report said more than 2,000 households were identified by the NFI and more than half had been reviewed resulting in 171 'amendments' to single person discounts resulting in an additional £114,364 extra council tax being collected.

It said: "Within the last year the counter fraud officer has investigated a total of 1,165 cases and provided estimated savings of £665,764 and the council has or is actively recovering £203,253 of income/wrongly paid expenditure.

" The case for continuing to support a counter fraud officer is strong and enhances the capability to detect and recover underpaid income and overpaid expenditure."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter