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# Fraud busters come in to watch council



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Friday, April 03, 2009

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NEW measures are coming in to tackle future suspected fraud and corruption at Stoke-on-Trent City Council – just weeks after the elected mayor was arrested. It will see a dedicated corporate fraud team monitoring the [council's](#) dealings with outside organisations and [business](#).



The tighter controls come as [Elected Mayor](#) Mark Meredith and former Conservative and Independent Alliance leader, councillor Roger Ibbs, are on [police](#) bail after being arrested over allegations of corruption.

Both men, who have vowed to clear their names, were questioned about the [council's](#) aborted plans to shut the splash pool at Dimensions Leisure Centre, in [Burslem](#), last year.

Meanwhile, the authority's audit officers are also investigating the handling of the sale of the [council's](#) stake in the [Britannia](#) Stadium in December 2007, although no corruption or fraud has been alleged.

The [council's](#) audit and risk manager, Sue Woodall, told members of the audit committee that the new draft anti-fraud and corruption strategy should be approved within days.

She said: "We are now bringing together a corporate fraud team that will address issues right across the authority, rather than pockets of good work where we focus on specific areas.

"The team will have a broader and more focused role when addressing fraud, while the strategy sets out what we would see as our minimum standards."

The [council](#) has also taken steps to distance its internal audit team from other departments and strengthen its links with the independent Audit Commission.

Audit officers will have to sign annual declarations of independence and adhere to strict confidentiality guidelines about their work.

A report to the audit committee said that the team, which would be called upon to investigate any suspected fraud or corruption, will be guaranteed "unrestricted access to all levels of management, personnel, elected members, premises, records and assets, including those of partner organisations".

The new strategy includes measures to encourage and protect whistle-blowers who report allegations to managers.

It states: "The city [council](#) fully recognises its responsibilities for spending public money and is committed to the fullest support for members and employees in upholding the reputation of the city council and maintaining the public's confidence in the integrity of the city council.

"The city [council](#) will deal firmly with those who defraud the council or who are corrupt."

Audit committee chairman councillor Ian Mitchell, [pictured](#), said: "The new anti-fraud and corruption strategy is an excellent idea and the corporate fraud team will bring all the [finance](#) officers involved together in one place, where they can have access to financial records and legal advice if necessary."