# Kent County Council uncovers £30,000 in fraudulent taxi invoicing



Kent County Council (KCC) has revealed that it uncovered nearly £30,000 in fraudulent invoicing by taxi firms that claimed payment for home-to-school transportation services that were never provided. This discovery occurred during routine checks that spanned from April to August 2024, where 15 instances of what has been termed "invoicing irregularities" were identified. The total value of these fraudulent claims amounted to £29,649.

The irregularities were detected through cross-referencing school attendance records with the payment claims submitted by taxi companies providing transportation under the home-to-school transport (HST) service, which caters to approximately 6,000 special needs pupils across Kent. The HST programme incurs an annual cost of around £70 million for Kent taxpayers, making it a significant area of expenditure for the council and, consequently, a potential target for fraudulent activity.

Cllr Ros Binks, Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee, expressed her concerns regarding the integrity of the invoicing process. She noted, "I am assuming that all invoices are checked and there are systems in place to pick up irregularities. I am not surprised irregularities happen, for all sorts of reasons including error, but councils have always been fair game because of a historic lack of checking. We have been pressing for a change in that culture, not least because KCC has to watch every penny it spends."

In response to these findings, KCC has implemented corrective measures. Offending taxi companies could face a range of consequences, including warning letters, contract suspensions, or even termination. The council has plans to recoup the mischarged amounts either by adjusting future invoicing or, if necessary, through traditional invoicing methods.

The committee’s discussions, which were documented under the heading "Irregularity Referrals by Directorate and Fraud Type," indicated that these invoicing issues are managed by the transport team within the Growth, Environment, and Transport Directorate of KCC. The transport team identifies irregularities through diligent checks of both invoices and school attendance data. In this particular period, the 15 instances of incorrect invoicing were specifically highlighted for their significant financial impact.

Mark Hood, a Green Party councillor who also serves on the Governance and Audit Committee, emphasised the importance of scrutiny within the system. He commented, "The issue regarding fraudulent charging for home to school taxi services is an important one. The scale of the use of taxis and the number of individual contracts does mean that there are opportunities to commit offences and it is right that £29,649 of incorrect invoicing has been identified for 15 contracts." He added that the situation requires diligence to ensure that proper payments are made for the safe transportation of vulnerable children, stating, "Of course there may be the odd invoicing mistake but, nevertheless, everything should be done to ensure nobody is paid more than they should be to take these children to and from their schools in safety."

The revelations by Kent County Council highlight ongoing vulnerabilities in processes related to public spending and serve as a reminder of the necessity for thorough oversight in awarding contracts that involve significant sums of taxpayer money.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/fewer-parents-winning-appeals-over-free-school-taxis-319029/> - This article provides context about Kent County Council's involvement with home-to-school transportation and the significant financial implications associated with this service. It highlights the financial pressures on KCC due to transportation costs for special needs pupils.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-transport-for-children-and-young-people> - This page explains general guidelines for school transport services, which can help contextualize the challenges and regulations faced by local councils like Kent County Council.
* <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/identifying-and-managing-fraud/> - This report by the National Audit Office discusses strategies for identifying and managing fraud within public services, which is relevant to KCC's efforts to address invoicing irregularities.
* <https://www.cifas.org.uk/insights-resources> - Cifas provides insights and resources on managing and preventing fraud, which aligns with the concerns and measures mentioned by Kent County Council to combat fraudulent invoicing.
* <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Fraud-Sentencing-Guidelines-web-1.pdf> - This document outlines guidelines for sentencing in fraud cases, which could inform the potential consequences for taxi companies found guilty of fraudulent invoicing.
* <https://www.local.gov.uk/services/improvement-and-allocation/improvement-and-eficiency-approaches/counter-fraud-strategies> - This webpage discusses strategies for addressing fraud in local government, aligning with KCC's efforts to scrutinize invoices and implement corrective measures.