

## Report of the Head of Finance and Delivery

Audit Committee – 17 November 2015

### BENEFITS INVESTIGATION TEAM - END OF YEAR REPORT - 2014/15

<b>Purpose:</b>	To report on the activities and achievements of the Benefits Investigation Team during 2014/15.
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.
<b>Reason for Decision:</b>	To allow the Audit Committee to review and discuss the work of the Benefits Investigation Team during 2014/15
<b>Consultation:</b>	Legal, Finance and Access to Services.
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It is recommended that: 1) The Report be noted.
<b>Report Author:</b>	Talfryn Davies
<b>Finance Officer:</b>	Paul Beynon
<b>Legal Officer:</b>	Sharon Heys
<b>Access to Services Officer:</b>	Sherill Hopkins

## 1. GLOSSARY

**CTB** - Council Tax Benefit.

**CTR** - The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which replaced CTB from 01.04.13.

**Data Matching** – An electronic comparison of Council records to those of other Council's and participating organisations. The aim is to identify and investigate discrepancies and minimise overpayments of benefits. There are two main types of Data Matching:

- **HBDMS** - The Housing Benefit Data Matching Service are part of the DWP. Each month they compare Council Benefit records to those of the other Council's, DWP, Retirement Pension, Royal Mail, and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. HBDMS highlights actual discrepancies.
- **NFI** - The National Fraud Initiative is a bi-annual exercise coordinated by the Audit Commission. They compare all Council records both internally and externally to other Councils and participating organisations. Records compared include Payroll, Pensions, Housing Rents, Taxi Licenses, Personal Alcohol Licenses, Student Loans, and Immigration. NFI simply highlights matches rather than actual discrepancies. Further evaluation is required to determine if benefits have been paid correctly or not.

**DWP** - Department for Work & Pensions.

**FES** - DWP's Fraud and Error Service (based in Murrison).

**FES(O)** - DWP's Organised Fraud and Error Service (based in Cardiff).

**HB** - Housing Benefit.

**IUC** - Interview Under Caution

An IUC is a taped interview conducted in accordance with the Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

An IUC is undertaken where an Investigator considers there is evidence to suspect a person has committed a criminal offence.

**LA** - Local Authority.

**Sanction** – After an IUC there are three Sanctions that can be applied / offered to persons who are considered to have committed Benefit fraud. They are:

- **Formal Caution**

A verbal warning. The person must sign a declaration confirming that they accept the warning and that they have committed a criminal offence.

- **Administrative Penalty**

A 'fine' offered to claimants or employers who have caused an overpayment. The person must sign a declaration confirming that they have committed a criminal offence.

- **Prosecution**

Criminal proceedings in the Magistrates or Crown Courts where the defendant has been Summoned or bailed to attend Court and subsequently found guilty of Benefit fraud.

Defendants have the option to refuse to accept the offer a Formal Caution or Administrative Penalty. However, if they do so, or they fail to attend an interview to discuss the offer, the Authority must consider prosecuting them instead. The standard of evidence for Formal Cautions and Administrative Penalties are the same as those for Prosecutions.

**SFIS** – The DWP's Single Fraud Investigation Service (part of the DWP's Fraud and Error Service - based in Morriston).

## 2. SUMMARY

### 2.1 **Headline figures:**

- Referrals = 1,186.
- Investigated / under Investigation =750.
- Fraud proven / Benefit Saved = 155.
- Interviews Under Caution (IUC's) = 174.
- Sanction action started = 125 cases.
- Overpayments created = £694,249.39.
- Sanctions achieved = 123.

### 2.2 **Joint Working with DWP Investigators:**

- Day to day joint between investigators generally continued to work well.
- However, the following have continued to result in less joint working cases:
  - DWP no longer being able to offer Formal Cautions to offenders.
  - DWP focusing on cases with the potential to yield prosecutions.

### 2.3 **Data Matching:**

- *National Fraud Initiative (NFI)*  
The examination and investigation of matches relating to NFI 2012 and 2014.
- *Housing Benefit Data Matching Service (HBDMS)*  
677 Data Match Referrals received and actioned by the Benefits Section.

### 2.4 **Fraud Awareness:**

- 'Adverts' screened at the Contact Centre.
- Court cases reported in the local media.
- Achievements 'publicised' to interested parties.
- Corporate Learning Pool training aid devised.

### 2.5 **Staff Resources:**

- An Assistant Benefits Officer retired on 31.03.14.
- 112 working days were lost due to sickness of 3 weeks or more.
- Officers participated in a significant joint police/Council operation relating to alleged benefit fraud and other public protection issues.
- On 01.06.15, the Single Fraud Investigation Service will be 'rolled out' in Swansea.

### 3. INTERVIEWS UNDER CAUTION (IUC)

3.1 This table illustrates the total number of IUC's undertaken and also those carried out jointly with FES.

IUC'S UNDERTAKEN – 2005/6 TO 2014/15																			
2005/6		2006/7		2007/8		2008/9		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT	TOTAL	JOINT
226	110 49%	225	141 62%	185	125 68%	201	114 57%	152	79 62%	236	134 57%	320	201 63%	223	105 47%	238	84 35%	174	62 26%

### 4. OVERPAYMENTS AND SANCTION ACTION

4.1 This table illustrates overpayment and Sanction cases.

OVERPAYMENTS CREATED AND/OR SANCTION ACTION STARTED, CONCLUDED OR ONGOING			
TYPE	NUMBER OF CASES	JOINT CASES WITH FES	VALUE OF LA & DWP OVERPAYMENTS
BROUGHT FORWARD FROM 2013/14 <i>I.E. CASES NOT CONCLUDED BY 31.03.14</i>	41	24	£459,941.53
NEW CASES FOR 2014/15 <i>I.E. CASES STARTED BETWEEN 01.04.14-31.03.15</i>	125	32	£694,249.39
CASES CARRIED FORWARD TO 2015/16 <i>I.E. NOT CONCLUDED BY 31.03.15</i>	41	19	£457,068.90

4.2 This table illustrates Sanctions achieved.

<b>SANCTIONS ACHIEVED – 2005/6 TO 2014/15</b>											
Type / Year	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
Formal Cautions	26	21	36	53	62	78	91	80	94	59	600
Administrative Penalties	54	32	17	25	20	15	18	14	17	13	225
Guilty Verdicts	77	42	50	47	39	43	71	69	69	51	558
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1383</b>
Sanctions Target				125	130	125	150	180	180	180	
Sanctions Achieved v Target				100%	93%	109%	120%	91%	100%	68%	

4.3 No target has been set for 2015/16 due the scheduled transfer of functions and staff to SFIS on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015, and pre-transfer case and staff 'migration' issues.

## **5. JOINT WORKING WITH DWP**

- 5.1 Day to day joint working with FES generally continued to work well. In addition, joint investigations have been undertaken with FES(O).
- 5.2 62 IUC's were undertaken jointly (26% of total IUC's).
- 5.3 35 Sanctions were achieved from joint working cases (28% of total Sanctions).
- 5.4 However, the following DWP policy changes introduced from 01.04.12 have continued to result in less joint working cases being undertaken:
- No longer being able to offer Formal Cautions to offenders.
  - Focusing on prosecution cases (i.e. with potential overpayments of at least £2,000).

Since 2011/12 the number of joint working invitations received from FES has fallen by 69%:

- 2011/12 = 177 invitations;
- 2012/13 = 79 invitations = a 55% reduction on the previous year;
- 2013/14 = 54 invitations = a 31% reduction on the previous year.
- 2014/15 = 58 invitations = a 7% increase on the previous year.

## **6. NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE (NFI)**

### **6.1 NFI 2012**

- January 2012 - Data Matches were 'published' by the Audit Commission.
- The Authority had 3,648 HB/CTB related Matches from 36 different Reports.
- 1,346 Matches examined to determine if further investigative action is appropriate.
- 84 Matches were subject to an investigation.
- Overpayments of £99,131 identified (£46,526 in LA Benefits & £52,605 in DWP Benefits).
- 10 Sanctions achieved.
- 2 investigations are ongoing.

### **6.2 NFI 2014**

- January 2014 - Data Matches were 'published' by the Audit Commission.
- The Authority had 2,547 HB/CTR related Matches from 40 different Reports.
- 953 Matches examined to determine if further investigative action is appropriate. Examination of the matches was shared by the Benefits Investigation Team and FES.
- 27 Matches were subject to an investigation.
- Overpayments of £16,984 identified (£13,803 in LA Benefits & £3,181 in DWP Benefits).
- 2 Sanctions achieved.
- 13 investigations are ongoing.

## **7. HOUSING BENEFIT DATA MATCHING SERVICE (HBDMS)**

- 7.1 677 Data Match referrals were received.
- 7.2 141 matches were passed directly to Investigators.
- 7.3 539 matches were initially passed to Processors. After Processors corrected any discrepancies, of these 10 matches were subsequently considered for investigative action.
- 7.4 16 Sanctions were achieved, (13% of total Sanctions), from the 151 Matches considered by Investigators

## **8. FRAUD AWARENESS**

- 8.1 Five different adverts highlighting benefit fraud and how to report suspicions continue to be shown on screens in the main reception area at the Civic Centre.
- 8.2 In an effort to reduce costs, in April 2014, the existing externally provided product was replaced with an in-house developed training aid via the Corporate Learning Pool.
- 8.3 Throughout the year:
  - Specific and detailed training was provided to new starters in the Benefits Section, as necessary.
  - Regular Newsletters and media publicity have been issued and forwarded to relevant LA staff and FES.

## **9. STAFF RESOURCES**

### **9.1 *An Assistant Benefits Officer (ABO) left the Authority***

The Team's 3 Assistant Benefits Officer posts have been reduced as follows:

- September 2012, an ABO left the Authority.
- On 31.03.14, an ABO retired.

Due to austerity measures, neither Officer was replaced. This meant that from 01.04.14, only one Assistant Benefits Officer 'serviced' the Investigation Team.

### **9.2 *Special operation***

'Operation Violet Quartz' was a significant multi-subject/address operation undertaken jointly between South Wales Police and the Benefits Investigation Team. Four of the Team's eight Officers were involved from August 2014 onwards in varying degrees. The operation covered alleged benefits fraud and drugs offences.

### **9.3 *Single Fraud Investigation Service***

SFIS was introduced nationally on 01.04.14. It is located within the DWP and is to be 'rolled-out' gradually from 01.04.14 and 31.03.16.

The relevant investigative functions currently undertaken by the authority are scheduled to be transferred to SFIS on 01.06.15.



This means that from 01.06.15, SFIS will be solely responsible for investigating all welfare benefit fraud in the Swansea area, including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit).

There are decisions to be made regarding the Authority's post-SFIS requirements (the authority will still be responsible for investigating Council Tax Reduction fraud).

These post-SFIS requirements will then inform how many posts from the authority's Benefits Investigation Team will transfer to SFIS on 01.06.15, and In February 2015, SFIS set up meetings commenced.

#### 9.4 **Sickness**

In total, 112 working days were lost due to sickness of 3 weeks or more.

### **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no financial implications to those set out in the report.

### **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no legal implications to those set out in the report.

### **12. EQUALITY AND ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 An EIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full EIA report is not required.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None

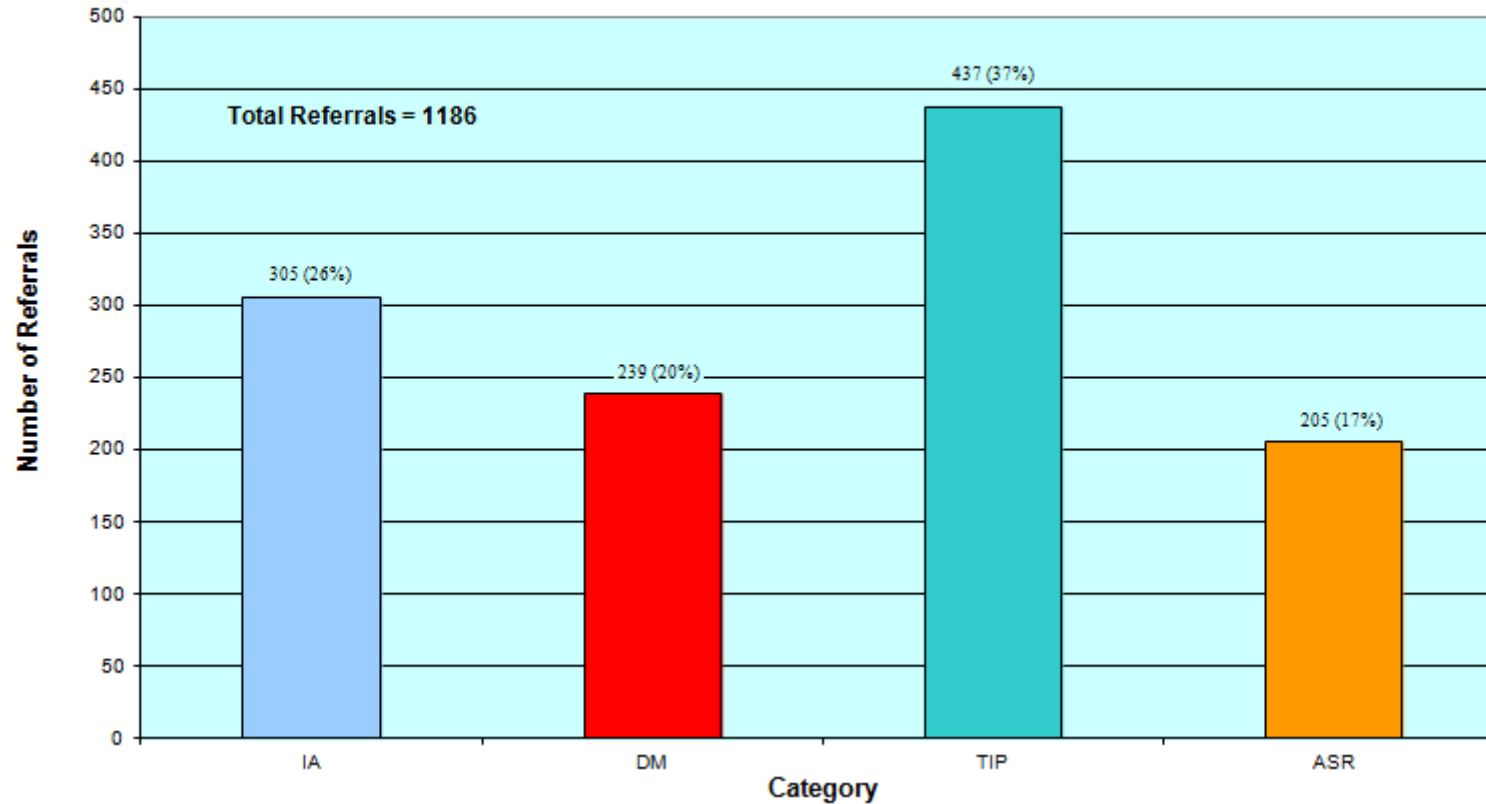
#### **APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Bar Charts and Pie Charts.

Appendix B – A selection of publicity.

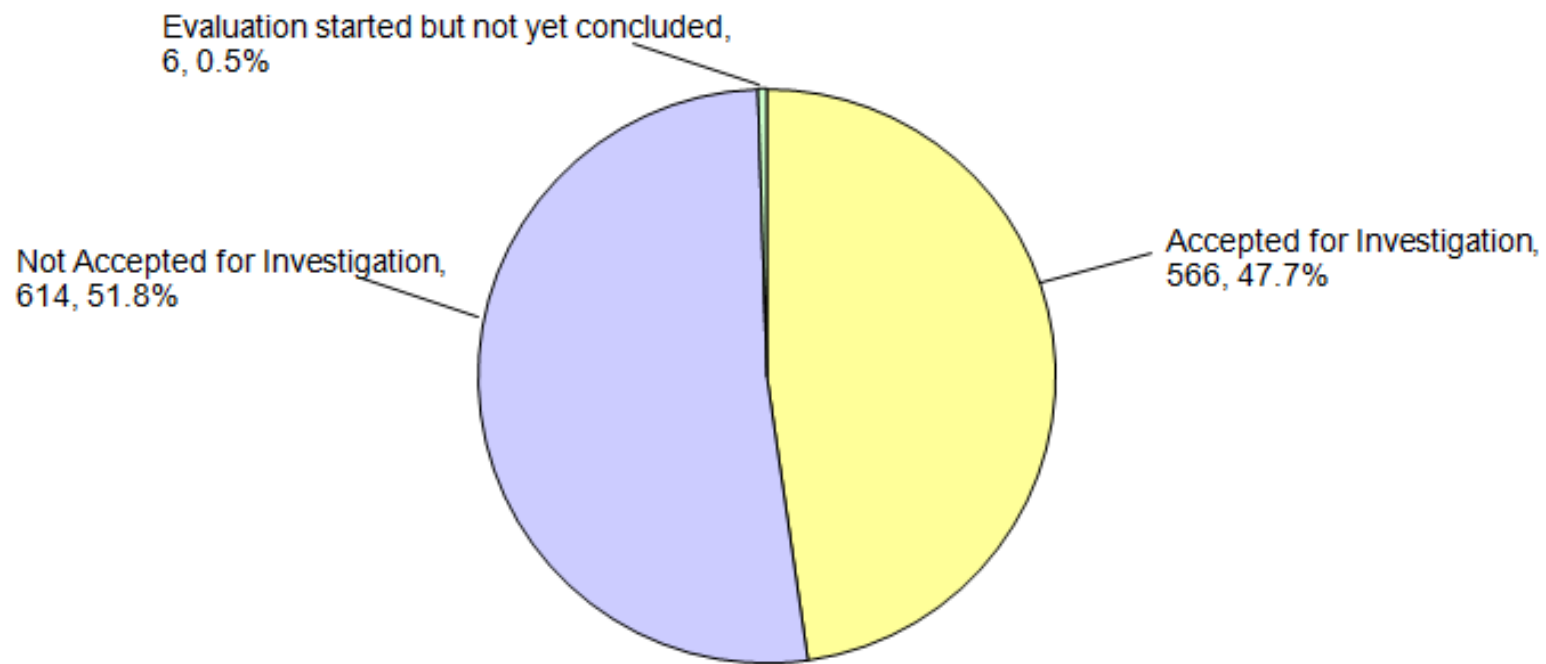
## Appendix A – Bar Charts and Pie Charts

SOURCES OF FRAUD REFERRALS FOR 01.04.14 TO 31.03.15

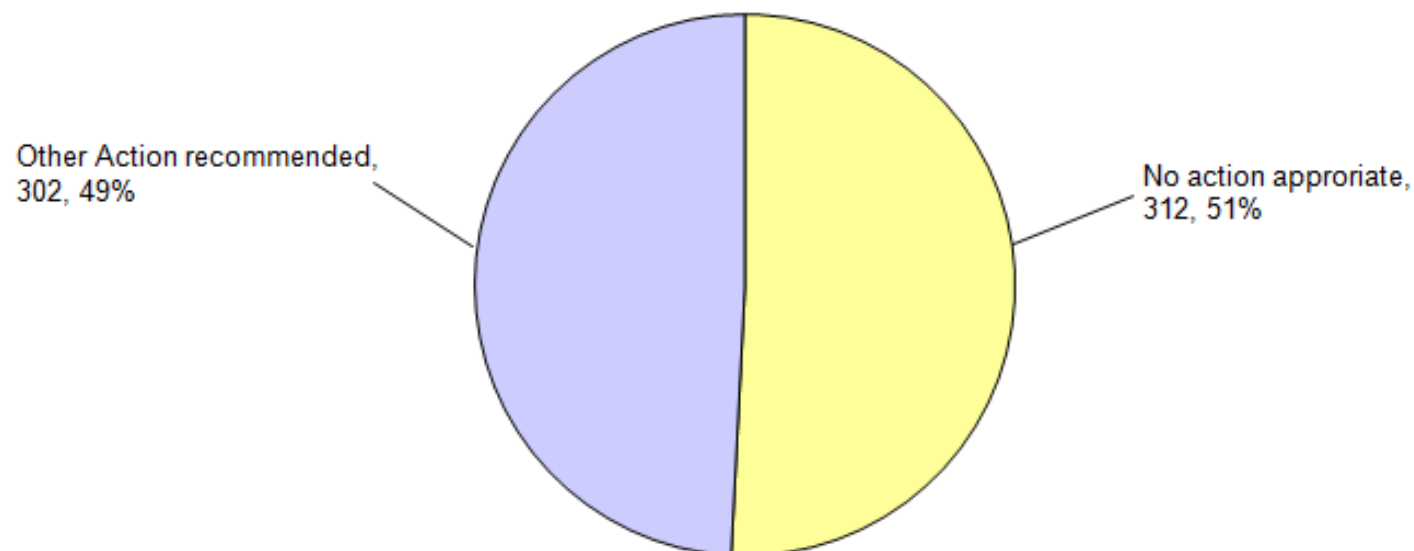


- IA = Investigative Activity = DNR Mail / Late Notifications / Dta Tank / Other Activity
- DM = Data Matching = HBMS / IDEA / NFI / RTI
- TIP = Tip Offs from the public / joint working invitations from FES / 'Other' Council Tax Staff / Fraud hotline / Web-site / Notified by an Official body
- ASR = Benefits staff / District Housing Office Staff

## FRAUD REFERRALS - STATUS SUMMARY - 1186 CASES



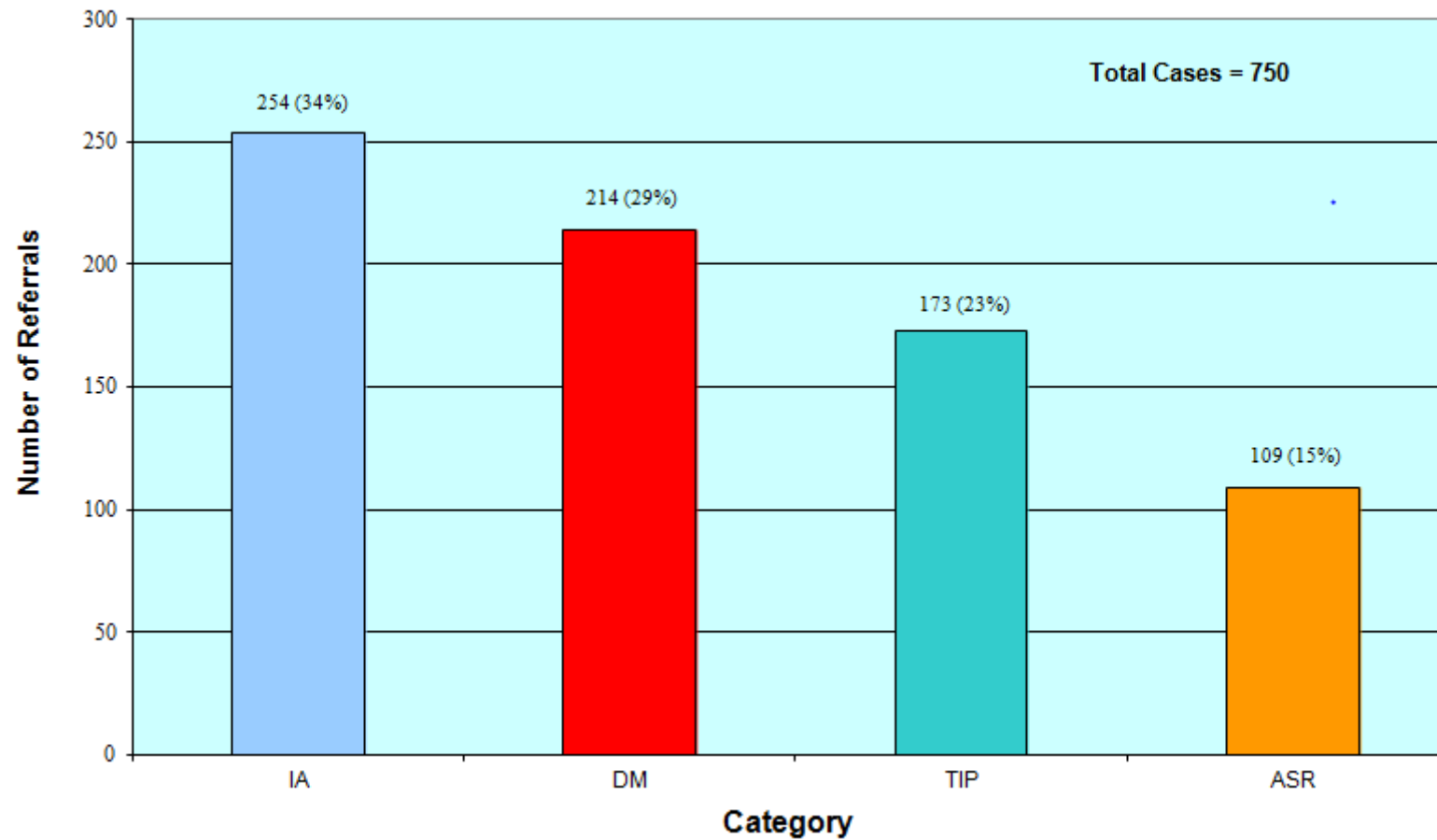
**FRAUD REFERRALS - BREAKDOWN OF STATUS TYPE  
NOT ACCEPTED FOR INVESTIGATION - 614 CASES**



'Other Action recommended' includes:

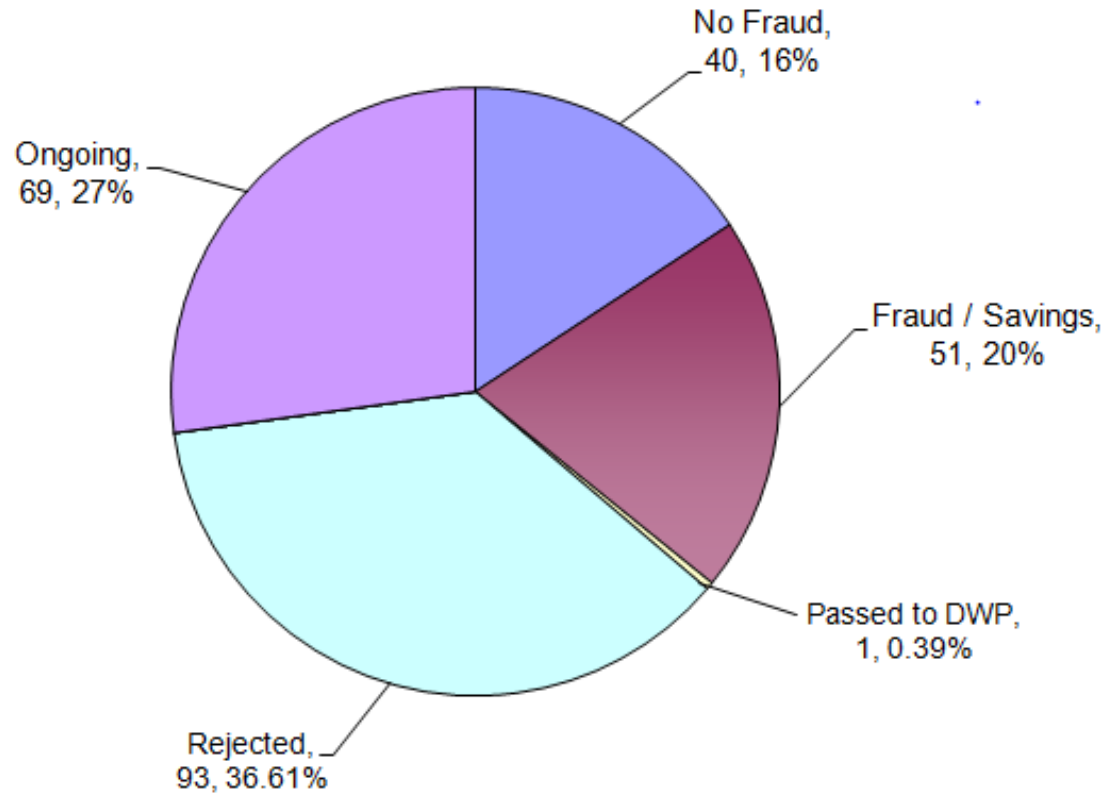
1. Passing the Referral to the DWP;
2. Passing the Referral to an LA Benefits Processing Team or an LA Benefits Visiting Officer;
3. Issuing an LA Benefit Review Form;

### SOURCES OF FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION - 01.04.14-31.03.15

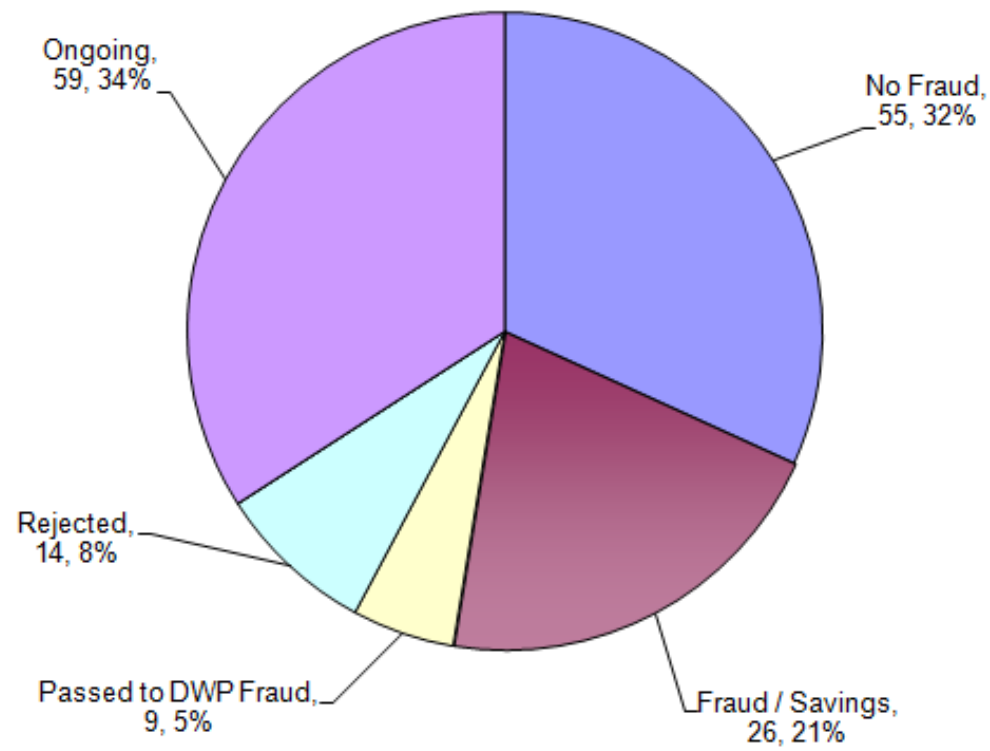


- IA = Investigative Activity = DNR Mail / Late Notifications / Data Tank / Returned mail (non DNR) / Other Activity
- DM = Data Matching = HBMS / IDEA / NFI / RTI
- TIP = Tip Offs from the public / joint working invitations from FIS / 'Other' Council Tax Staff / Fraud hotline / Web-site / Notified by an Official body
- ASR = Benefits staff / District Housing Office Staff

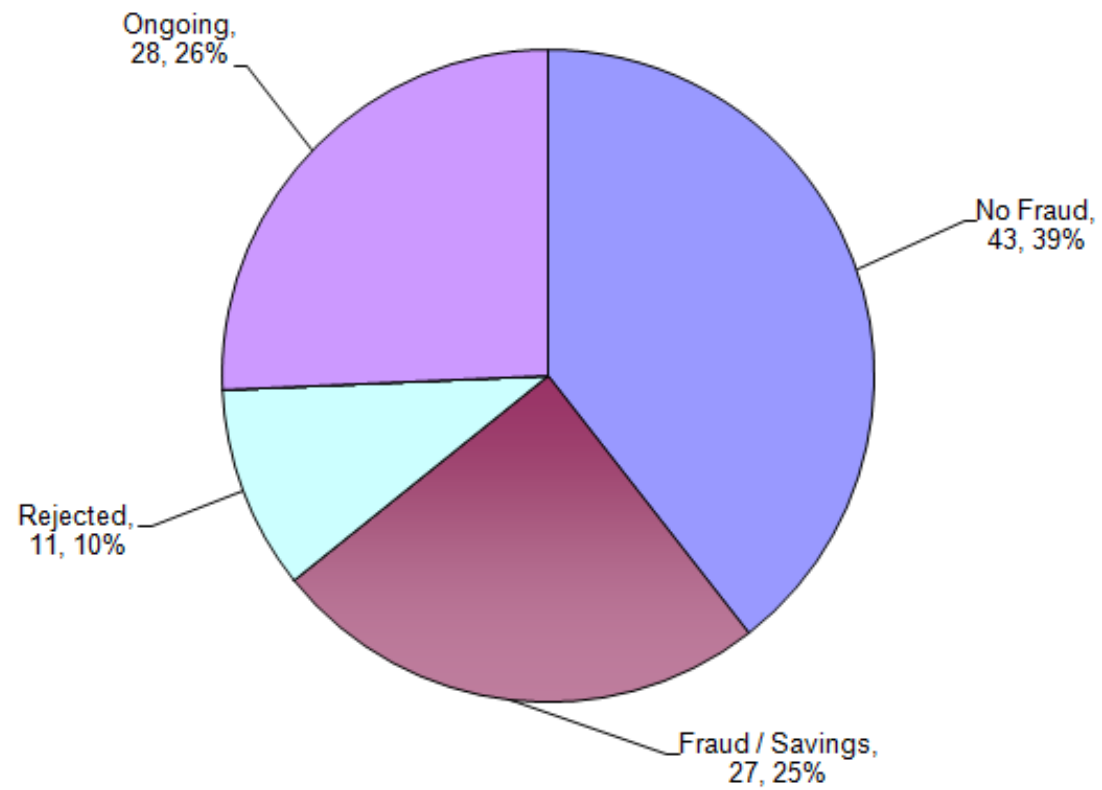
**FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION  
INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY - 254 CASES**



**FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION  
TIP OFFS - 173 CASES**

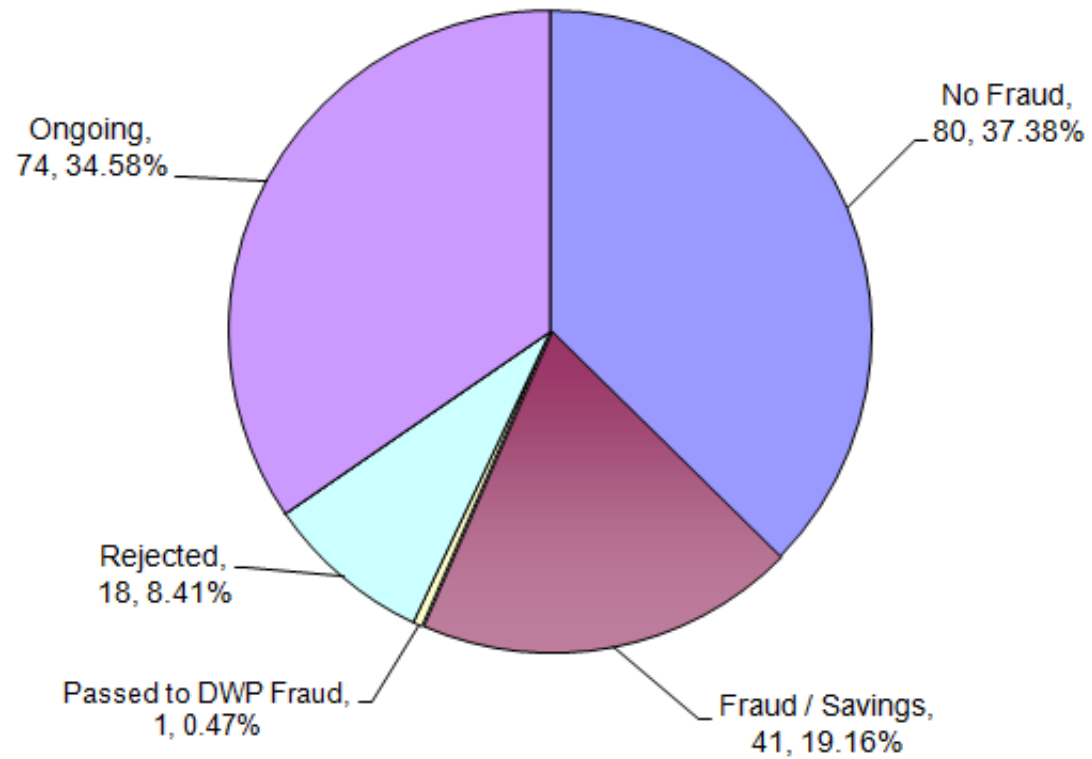


**FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION  
BENEFITS & DISTRICT HOUSING OFFICE STAFF - 109 CASES**

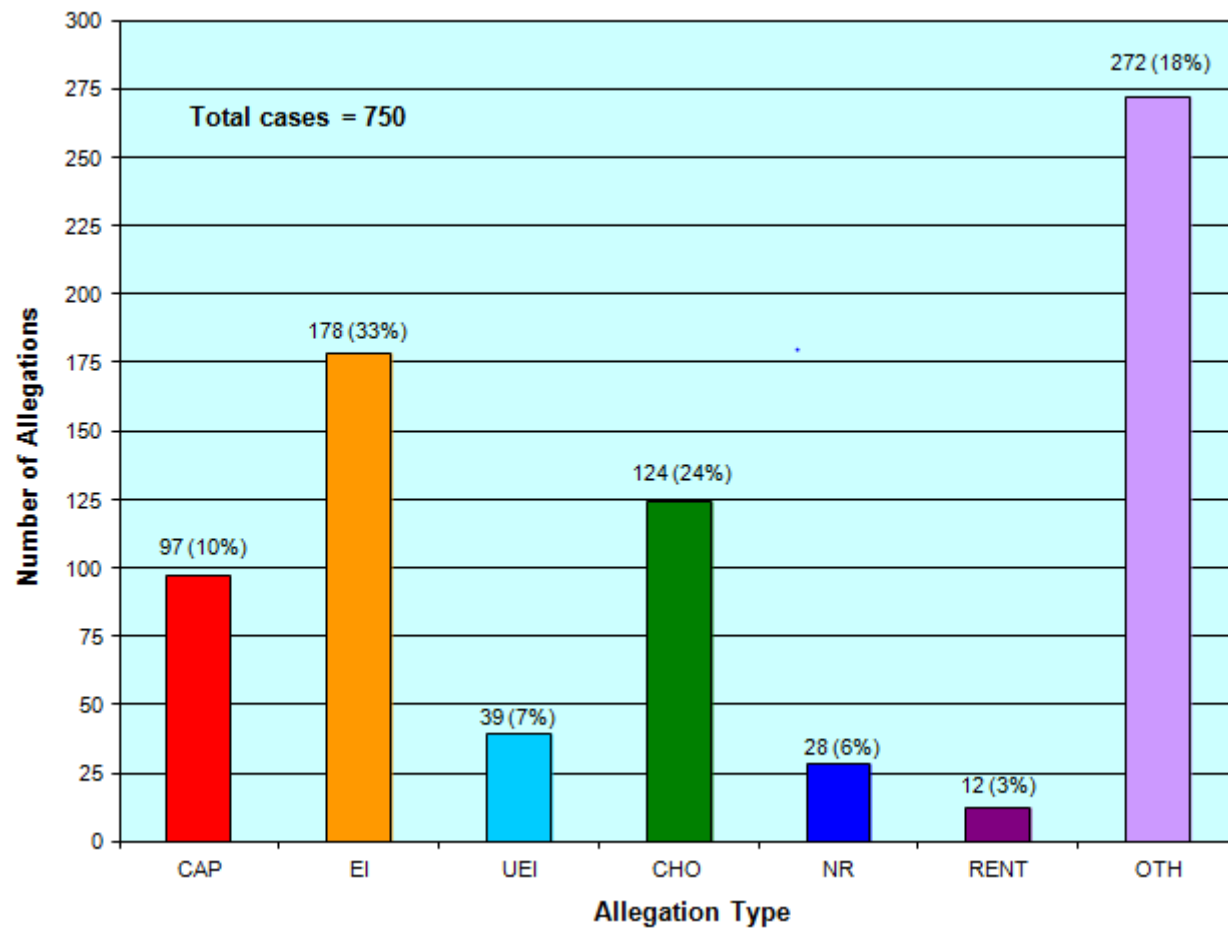




**FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION  
DATAMATCHING - ALL TYPES - 214 CASES**



ALLEGATIONS - FRAUD CASES INVESTIGATED / UNDER INVESTIGATION - 01.04.14-31.03.15



- CAP = Undeclared Capital (land/property/investments/cash)
- EI = Earned Income (work)
- UEI = Unearned Income (eg pension), Other Benefits
- CHO = Composition of Household (eg Partner / Non dependant / Dependant)
- NR = Not resident / Failure to notify a change of address
- RENT = Amount of eligible rent / Collusion Llord & tenant / Fraud solely by Llord / No tenancy / Contrived tenancy
- OTH = Other (expired reviews / incorrectly treated as on IS, JSA, PGC / Other)

## Appendix B – A selection of publicity

PAGES 12 & 13 - SOUTH WALES EVENING POST - 22.04.14

**NEWS**focus

# Pledge to beat benefit cheats

**RUTH MOSALSKI**

@ruthmosalski • 01792 545546  
ruth.mosalski@swmmedia.co.uk

SWANSEA Council has uncovered more than £500,000 of benefit fraud in the last year — and they have warned that fraudsters will not get away with it.

Between April 1, 2013 and March 31, 2014, the council's benefits investigation team uncovered a total of £502,872.12 of benefit fraud.

That included £434,591 of housing benefit, £56,197 of council tax benefit and £12,082 of council tax reduction.

And by working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in joint cases, they found fraudulent claims, in a range of other benefits, amounting to £246,005.84.

That total amount, of £748,877, is down on previous years.

During the previous year, the council's team helped uncover more than £1.1million of fraud being

committed in the area. This year's efforts saw 180 people punished for benefit fraud. Of those, 69 found themselves in either the magistrates or crown court, another 17 received an administrative penalty and 94 accepted a caution.

They were caught by a variety of methods, including tip-offs from the

If you know of anyone stealing benefits, report it in confidence online at [www.swansea.gov.uk/benefit/fraud](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/benefit/fraud) or by calling 01792 635359. You can also call the National Benefit Fraud hotline on 0800 328 6340.

public, data-matching exercises to check what a person was being given to live off and what they were spending as well as training for staff and joint-working with teams from the Department for Work and Pensions

Rob Stewart, Swansea Council's cabinet member for finance, said: "As

a council we work hard to help people claim the benefits they are legally entitled to.

"However fraudsters who knowingly withhold information or deliberately fail to promptly report a change in their circumstances to get benefit they're not entitled to are stealing from every one of us and they must be held to account. Case after case proves we will eventually catch the benefit cheats and they will not get away with their crimes."

Tal Davies, Swansea Council's investigations manager, added: "We are pleased our work is getting results and will continue to track down the benefit cheats."

He said they will plan to continue working with other agencies.

"In appropriate circumstances, we will continue to jointly work with the DWP's fraud team to ensure that the full extent of all benefit frauds are uncovered."

The UK Government say benefit fraud cost the economy £1.2 billion between 2011 and 2012.

An investigator from the Benefits Agency keeps a suspected benefit cheat under observation.

## Major probe

ONE of this year's biggest cases for the council's benefit investigation team was "Operation Bugs".

As part of that, 12 defendants found themselves not only being prosecuted for their part in the cold-calling scam to sell dodgy policies to customers, who were often vulnerable and elderly, but also benefit fraud for what was the biggest investigation of its kind in the city.

They claimed more than £51,000 in benefits which they were not entitled to while working for a call centre originally based in the Kingsway, from where they sold Sky TV policies.

The bosses of that call centre received lengthy sentences for fraud and many of their employees also received concurrent terms for falsely claiming benefits at the same time as being paid cash-in-hand.

The 12 individuals who faced benefit fraud charges received either terms of imprisonment, suspended sentences, community orders or official cautions.

The operation was run between the police, Swansea Council's trading standards and the Department for Work and Pensions.

THE BIG FEATURE

### CASE STUDY NO.1

HUSBAND and wife fraudsters Lesley Isobel Jones and husband Thomas Adrian Jones are yet to be sentenced, but have been warned they face jail after being found guilty of fiddling £108,000 in benefits.

Lesley Jones drove around in a BMW with a personalised number plate, took her family on holiday to Turkey, Sharm el Sheikh and Spain and bought a £27,000 luxury caravan berthed in a seaside holiday park – all while claiming she was a single mum.

Thomas Jones had claimed that the relationship had ended when the couple split up during their wedding reception and the pair stood trial, but were convicted by a jury.

Thomas Jones had claimed he realised their marriage was a mistake on their wedding day in 2006, walked out of the wedding reception and did not see his wife again for two weeks and only moved in with her in 2011, but the prosecution proved they had lived together throughout their marriage.



### CASE STUDY NO.2

HOLIDAYS in Hawaii, Bali and New York, artwork on the wall – a nice life if you can get it, and Susan Robinson did just that.

The pensioner from Llangeinifon, Gower visited a host of far-flung destinations and spent "a large amount of money" on art while failing to tell the authorities about the substantial inheritance she had in a building society.

She claimed housing and council tax benefits and pension credits for almost six years without declaring she had £20,000 in an undeclared bank account.

She has already paid back £11,000 but did receive a four-month jail sentence, suspended for 18 months.



# Counting on the tips that really do pay off



In these difficult times where every penny counts, RUTH MOSALSKI takes a look at how the net tightens around benefit cheats.

THE hotline phone never stops ringing, whether it's a disgruntled family member or colleague calling – the tip-offs about benefit cheats come all year round.

The Department of Work and Pensions calculate that in the last year, in the greater Swansea area, there has been £2 million overpaid to benefits cheats.

Not every tip-off leads to action being taken, but once they believe there is a good reason to investigate, they do.

Not only can they access their own records, but they can also call on colleagues from the police, Inland Revenue or council.

Sometimes cheats can face administrative penalties or land themselves in the dock. Last year there were 120 prosecutions in the greater Swansea area.

The more the amount and the more deliberate the scam, the more likely the case is to end up in court.

Department of Work and Pensions fraud investigator, Delmie Evans, says the most frequent reason why people are prosecuted is by people not informing of a change in circumstances, having more capital – either property or savings than allowed when receiving benefits – or undeclared income.

Mr Evans said: "Most of our cases are based on circumstances whereby the original claim was accurate and correct, but there's been a change of circumstances that affect their benefit entitlement and they didn't tell us, either the change is in relation to the claimant or sometimes in relation to their partner."

He said people have to inform them of changes, no matter how small, because they easily add up. "They say, 'I can leave it for a while, no-one is going to find me' and then it continues and continues."

But he urged people to keep ringing the hotline because last year the overpayment added up to £2 million. "People are sometimes afraid to report people they believe to be defrauding the benefit system in case they're not on benefits – however they should be reassured that we will not interview people without thoroughly checking the information received against our benefit systems and any intelligence gathered in the process."

### CASE STUDY NO.3

A HOLIDAY home would be on a wish list for many of us and one man made that dream come true. But, Paul Lapping bought it with £125,000 he received after his mother died and continued to claim an extra £45,800 in payouts. Lapping was told by the judge sentencing him that what he had done was driven by "pure greed" when he was sentenced last year.

He bought a house in Ontario in Canada, but told the court he had lost all but £17,000 when he sold the house five years later.

Lapping, aged 53, from Alderway, West Cross, was told taxpayers had lost £45,000 and he was repaying that at £14.20 a week – at that rate he would be over 100 when all paid back.

### CASE STUDY NO.4

Ronald Morgan was claiming disability allowance while working as a roofer and landed himself in court.

Morgan, then 64, from Pembrey, was caught after an anonymous call to the DWP's fraud hotline.

He had claimed benefits after having problems with his right foot and balance – which would cause him to fall over three times a week.

But in 2011 he felt better, began working again and made an extra £4,000 in benefits.

He was filmed working on a roof by officers and admitted his guilt.





# THE REAL STORY

# BENEFIT CHEATS

**Public outrage** followed pictures of White Dee - aka Deirdre Kelly, star of Channel 4's *Benefits Street* - living it up on holiday earlier this month - despite claiming she's too depressed to work.

Benefit fraud cost the UK taxpayers £12 billion in 2013 - up £100 million on the previous year. But just 250 out of 7188 benefits cheats were banged up in 2012.

Last week, it was reported that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has frozen the unlikely TV star's £101 a week sickness benefit after she started cashing in on her growing celebrity status.

Labour MP Simon Danczuk, whose single mum brought him up on benefits, said, "It's frankly insulting that on the one hand I have a constituent who's in a coma - who the Government is hassling to get back to work - while Kelly has been making a mockery of the system.

I'm delighted that, in light of the national outcry and that it obviously looks like she was making cash from promotional work, the DWP has done the right and proper thing and frozen her benefits until they investigate her."

There's plenty of people happy to play the system, though... With investigators turning to Facebook, Twitter and even YouTube to find proof of dubious claimants, a whole raft of shocking cheats are being unearthen.

Real People's Andrea Leeboddy investigates the UK's most outrageous benefit fraudsters...

**White Dee on holiday**



**POSTER BOY**

Paul Lewis' crippling agoraphobia was so bad he allegedly suffered panic attacks whenever he left his house.

But his nerves didn't seem to get the better of him when appearing on stage as a pub singer and guitar player as his alter ego, Paul Rio!

While claiming disability benefits, the 49-year-old was living it large on the Swansea club circuit, pocketing £200 a week, before investigators spotted his face on a poster advertising his gigs.

The shamed singer initially tried to claim the posters had been doctored and his face had been Photoshopped onto Paul Rio's. But in May 2014, he got a 20-week jail sentence - suspended for 18 months - after admitting nine sample offences of fraud, having falsely received £35,749 in incapacity benefits.

**Paul Lewis performing**



to the Jobcentre to sign on, raking in housing benefit, income support and council tax benefit.

In April 2013, she was sentenced to a 12-month community order, with 215 hours unpaid work, and ordered to repay the she owed, after admitting six counts of fraud.

**Banana on telly**

When she won £95,000 on telly show *Deal Or No Deal* in 2011, Caroline Banana, from Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, was quids in.

But her winnings didn't deter her from making a fortnightly trip

**WHAT A DRAG!**

Mark Hawthorn, 49, told authorities he could barely get out of bed and needed round-the-clock care.

Over 10 years, he pocketed £88,000 in incapacity benefits while secretly working as a drag queen called Aunt Tilly - the star of a drag act called Glittertips! Donning frocks and wigs, Mark would mime to songs by Tina Turner and Diana Ross.

He was caught in the act - literally - when fraud snoopers discovered a YouTube and Facebook video of him in action, rocking a blonde wig, high heels and cocktail dress!

But Mark had to hang up his heels temporarily when he was jailed for six months at Stafford Crown Court, after admitting three counts of failing to notify a change in circumstances and two counts of fraud.

**Mark Hawthorn**

**FIGHTING FIT**

During an open-air display, as part of 2012 Olympic Relay, Mark Ashman, 51, took part in a boxing match crowd cheered filmed Mark on mobile phone he sparred with a partner in the outdoor ring in Wolverhampton.

But the boxer suffered a body blow when investigators uploaded to YouTube... because Mark fact, a benefit cheat who'd pocketed after claiming he couldn't walk and his was so bad he required round-the-clock care.

He was spared jail after pleading guilty to a housing benefit fiddle, allegedly claiming he and Caroline had a partner in the outdoor ring in Wolverhampton.

**Mark Ashman**

**GOING BANANAS!**

When she won £95,000 on telly show *Deal Or No Deal* in 2011, Caroline Banana, from Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, was quids in.

But her winnings didn't deter her from making a fortnightly trip

**Caroline Banana**

**Caught on camera boxing!**



**Real People**

Mr Paul Lewis aka Paul Rio, claimed benefit from Somerset Place, Swansea. At Swansea Crown Court he pleaded guilty to failing to disclose employment. LA overpayments amounted to £14,836.00. On 02.05.14, Mr Lewis was sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment suspended for 18 months.



Lesley Isobel Jones (left) and Thomas Jones cover their faces as they arrive at court.  
 Pictures: Athens News Agency

# 'Estranged' husband jailed in £100k scam

**RUTH MOSALSKI**  
 @ruthmosalski • 01792 545546  
 ruth.mosalski@swmedia.co.uk

A HUSBAND who said he had walked out of his wedding reception has been jailed after his supposedly estranged wife claimed more than £100,000 in benefits, claiming she was a lone parent.

Mum-of-five Lesley Isobel Jones fiddled more than £108,000 in benefits over ten years by claiming she was a single mum.

She has avoided an immediate term in prison, but Judge Keith Thomas said that was only because of her children.

Judge Thomas said her 15 month sentence would be suspended for two years: "There is one reason and one reason only in your case, and that's your children."

But he said she would also have to complete 300 hours of unpaid work. Her husband is beginning an immediate 15 month sentence after their claims they had separated before cutting the cake were "wholly rejected" by the jury.

**You worked together to hide the fact he was working and you were married and living as a couple.**

**Judge Keith Thomas**

Thomas Jones, aged 52, said when he left the reception in 2000, he didn't see his wife again for two weeks.

He also claimed they hadn't living together until 2011, but his wages were sent to her address in Landore, Swansea, the TV licence was in his name, they had a joint bank account and he paid the bills.

Lesley Jones, aged 50, took her family to Turkey, Sharm el Sheikh and Spain while claiming income support, employment support, tax credits and council tax relief.

She drove a BMW and bought a £27,000 luxury caravan berthed in a seaside holiday park.

Thomas Jones had lost his job with Royal Mail after receiving a four month suspended sentence for stealing mail.

The pair had tried to hide their faces after appearing at court to avoid being photographed.

Judge Thomas said: "You worked together to hide the fact he was working and you were married and living as a couple. Each of you knew what the other was doing. It is a serious offence. Benefits are there for people who genuinely need them."



COURT

# 'No hiding place for frauds'

**ALEX BROWN**

@alexbrown78 • 01792 545534  
alex.brown@swwmedia.co.uk

SWANSEA Council has welcomed tough sentences handed down to husband and wife benefits fraudsters who claimed their relationship ended on their wedding day.

Lesley Jones and Thomas Jones claimed they broke up at their reception and then separately claimed more than £108,000 in income support, employment support allowance and council tax benefit.

Now both have been sentenced after a joint operation between Swansea Council's Benefits Investigations Team and the Department for Work and Pensions revealed the extent of their fraud.

Lesley Jones was given a 15-month jail term -- suspended for two years. She also has to complete 300 hours of unpaid work. Thomas Jones was jailed for 15 months.

Following their appearance in court Swansea Council warned benefits fraudsters in Swansea that they would be pursued.

Rob Stewart, cabinet member for finance, said: "There is no hiding place for those who think they can

defraud the system.

"Benefit fraud is not a victimless crime, because the money this couple cheated was stolen from the rest of us to fund a lifestyle which they had not earned and to which they were not entitled."

Over the last year Swansea Council benefits investigators working alone or alongside the DWP, uncovered almost £750,000 in benefit fraud.

Furthermore the efforts of Swansea Council's Benefits Investigation Team resulted in 180 people being punished for benefit fraud with 69 being found guilty by magistrates or Crown courts, 17 accepting a financial penalty, and 94 accepting a verbal warning.

Tal Davies, Swansea Council's investigations manager, said: "We are pleased our work is getting results and will continue to find all those who steal benefits. We're also working with the DWP fraud team to make that happen. The team is currently investigating almost 150 cases of alleged benefit fraud."

●If you know of anyone stealing benefits you can report it, in confidence, locally online at [www.swansea.gov.uk/benefitsfraud](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/benefitsfraud), or by calling 01792 635359 or call the National Benefit Fraud hotline on 0800 328 6340.



Lesley Isobel Jones (left) and Thomas Jones.

Pictures: Athena Picture Agency

## Woman in £18k benefits fraud

A WOMAN who claimed almost £18,000 in benefits she wasn't entitled to has been given a suspended prison sentence.

Victoria Louise Davies pleaded guilty to two charges at Swansea Magistrates' Court of committing fraud by failing to disclose to Swansea Council that she was living with a partner at Tymawr Street in Port Tennant.

The court was told the 29-year-old had been receiving employment support allowance on the basis she was a single person, as well as housing benefit and council tax benefit, between 2012 and 2013.

The court heard, however, that Associated British Ports had confirmed an employee, Keith Dyer, had identified Davies as his emergency contact and next of kin.

Prosecuting, Anwen Evans said when Davies had been interviewed by investigators: "She initially denied living with Mr Dyer, and had no financial help, but had got a relationship [with him]."

Mitigating, Grayson Tanner told the court that Davies had already begun repaying the £17,944, and added: "Her clean character has been lost as a result [but] she assures me she will not trouble this court again, and I believe the sentiment to be genuine."

Sentencing Davies to 18 weeks suspended for 12 months, chairman of magistrates Andy Pudduck said: "Nearly £18,000 is a substantial amount of money." She was also ordered to do 120 hours unpaid work, and pay £85 costs, and a victim surcharge of £80.

# £26k benefit cheat owned two houses

### Jason Evans

@evanscrime • 01792 545549  
jason.evans@swmmedia.co.uk

AN oil rig worker falsely claimed more than £26,300 in benefits while getting a monthly income from an insurance policy and owning two houses in Scotland, a court has heard.

Mark Owen-Griffiths, from Clase, claimed more than £21,500 in council tax and housing benefit from Swansea Council and more than £4,000 in employment support allowance.

The fraud only came to light thanks to "data matching" with information held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and other government agencies.

Owen-Griffiths, aged 50, of Rheidol Court, had previously pleaded guilty to 12 dishonestly failing to notify change of circumstance charges when he appeared at Swansea Crown Court for sentencing.

Leah Griffiths, in mitigation, said Owen-Griffiths — who is originally from Pembrokeshire — had had a well paid job on North Sea oil rigs before industrial accidents left him with limited use of his arms, and unable to work.

Because of his injuries he received money from a group insurance policy.

Ms Griffiths said her client suffered from severe depression as a result of what had happened, and was in constant pain requiring the use of the strong painkiller ketamine.

She said: "It is fair to say he is not a man in good health — he suffers on a daily basis.

"He confines himself indoors, and does not have much motivation to get himself outside.

"He came to Swansea to make a fresh start, he did not come to this area to make fraudulent claims."

She added that Owen-Griffiths "put the information on the forms he thought he had to put" but that now accepted that it was a fraudulent claim.

The court heard Owen-Griffiths was some £42,000 in debt but was now getting help from agencies including the Citizens' Advice Bureau in managing his finances.

He is also taking up Tai Chi.

Ms Griffiths said Owen-Griffiths had sold one of his Scottish houses and had paid back all the money owed to Swansea Council, and that he was in then process of selling the second to help clear his outstanding debts.

Magistrates imposed an eight-week prison sentence suspended for 12 months, and ordered him to pay £200 of the £840 costs the council had incurred in investigating the fraudulent benefit claims.



<http://www.southwales-eveningpost.co.uk/750-000-cocaine-plus-cars-quad-bikes-jewellery-50/story-24976443-detail/story.htm>

## £750,000 of cocaine - plus cars, quad bikes, jewellery and £50,000 in cash - seized in police raids

By [EvansTheCrime](#) | Posted: December 02, 2014



Police have recovered more than 55lbs of cocaine worth some £750,000 in a series of raids on houses in Swansea.

The drugs bust also netted £50,000 in cash along with a haul of jewellery, cars, motorbikes and quad bikes.

The series of co-ordinated raids happened at properties in [Penlan](#), [Treboeth](#) and Cwmdru, and police have praised the public for coming forward with information about what was happening in their communities.

Ten people arrested in connection with the operation have been charged with conspiracy to supply the Class A drug, and all have been remanded into custody.

South Wales Police chief Superintendent Phil Davies, divisional commander for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot, said: "This was a major drugs operation which has resulted in 10 arrests and a significant amount of Class A drugs, cash and property being recovered.

“Much of the information we receive about drug dealing comes from the community and in this case I would like to thank members of the community, particularly in Penlan, for the information they have provided us which we have listened to and acted upon.

“You cannot underestimate the amount of damage drugs does to a community and the tragic consequences it has for users, their families and friends.”

He added: “Anyone with information about drugs in their community should contact police.”

Those arrested and charged were — Carl Honey-Jones, aged 30, of Penlan Road, Treboeth; Donna Marie Honey-Jones, aged 31, of Penlan Road, Treboeth; Christian Fielding, aged 32, of Heol Gwyrosydd, Penlan; Matthew Cole, aged 35, of Carmarthen Road, Cwmdru; Brian Harding, aged 58, of St Clears Place, Penlan; Sandra Harding, aged 61, of St Clears Place, Penlan; Peter John Harris, aged 58, of Prescelli Road, Penlan; Rachel Honey-Jones, aged 26, of Prescelli Road, Penlan; William Alan Harding, aged 42, of Penmynydd Road, Penlan; and 24-year-old Matthew Ashley Jones, of Heol Gwyrosydd, Penlan.

Police say that along with more than 55lbs cocaine officers recovered £50,000 in cash, expensive jewellery and watches, five cars, two motorbikes and four quad bikes.

The 10 people arrested are due to appear at Swansea Crown Court on December 8.

# £33k benefits cheats hauled before courts

## Liz Perkins

@lizperkinspost • 01792 545551  
elizabeth.perkins@swmedia.co.uk

THREE benefit fraudsters from Swansea have been prosecuted after cheating the system out of a whopping £33,000.

Karen Rix, aged 51, of Rosewood Court, Penlan, Amy Norman, aged 32, of Heol Will George, Waunarlwydd, and Jacqueline Owen aged 43 of Smyrna Street, Plasmarl, all pleaded guilty to the offence.

It emerged during the Swansea Magistrates Court case that they had diddled the system out of housing benefit, council tax benefit and council tax reduction.

The fraud was uncovered by Swansea Council's benefits investigation team.

David Hopkins, cabinet member for communities and housing, said benefits were in place for people in most need and that the case highlighted how people were ripping off the tax payer.

He said: "Benefits are designed to

help people who are financially vulnerable and really need the support. Cheating the system not only rips off the taxpayer but undermines a support system designed to protect the more vulnerable people in society.

"The investigation team constantly have potential cases flagged up to them. This could be, for example, by an anonymous tip-off about a partner living at the address or undeclared earnings. The team can uncover unlawful overpayments in various ways once someone is under investigation."

Karen Rix pleaded guilty to benefit fraud amounting to £12,467.67. She was sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment suspended for 12 months. A six-week curfew was also imposed.

Amy Norman pleaded guilty to benefit fraud amounting to £4,991.28. She was sentenced to a community order for six weeks and a curfew for six weeks. Jacqueline Owen pleaded guilty to benefit fraud amounting to £15,523.00. She was sentenced to 20 weeks imprisonment suspended for 12 months and 180 hours unpaid work.