

Door-to-door blitz On benefit cheats

Officials target couples who lie about living apart

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FRAUD investigators are launching a door-to-door blitz to catch couples who rake in extra benefits by falsely claiming to live apart.

The taskforce hopes to save the taxpayer £100million by interviewing every claimant in high-risk postcode areas.

Their main targets are parents who say they live alone while in fact cohabiting with their partner or husband.

The officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and Revenue and Customs will check benefit payments, bank accounts, tax credits and any outside earnings. They will also work with councils to check residential addresses.

Pretending to be a lone parent is a simple way of picking up higher benefits, usually through tax credits.

The crackdown starts with 5,000 households in Perry Barr and Kingstanding.

'Sending a clear warning'

which make up the B44 postcode of Birmingham. Other postcodes around country with an unusually high number of claimants will be visited from the autumn.

Lord Freud, minister for welfare reform, said: 'The new taskforce is our latest weapon in tackling welfare fraud on the front line.

'We are sending a clear warning that if you are fiddling the system, you will be caught. Welfare fraud is a crime and takes money away from the most vulnerable.

'People who are receiving the correct benefits and tax credits have absolutely nothing to fear.

'But if people have deliberately not told us of a change in circumstances, they should do so now, before the team comes knocking at their door.

Changes to the way benefits are paid will, by 2013, make it easier to catch fraudsters. Those who

MS VOW TO HELP CHILDREN

INTERVENING in problem families before a child reaches three is the only way to improve their life chances, Iain Duncan Smith said yesterday.

The Work and Pensions Secretary said failure to act early on can hold a child back for ever.

In a speech to the Centre for Social Justice, the think-tank he founded, he said: 'We will be in a position to make a powerful offer to some of the poorest families in our society, building a solid foundation for the future.

'If we don't, the next generation could be condemned to repeat the mistakes and problems of those in genuine need being siphoned off into the pockets of cheats and fraudsters.

The new taskforce delivers on our commitment to tackle benefit fraud and together with the extra £917million we have reinvested in HMRC sends a very clear message.'

A spokesman for the DWP said the taskforce costs would be absorbed by the department and do not require any extra outlay. The Revenue will also merge its fraud investigations unit with that of the Department for Work and Pensions.

They aim to reduce the annual welfare fraud and error bill by as much as one quarter - or £1.4billion - by March 2015.

than one million claims will be examined to search for official or customer error.

Since January this year, court cases have identified more than £1million lost by taxpayers to benefit claimants who claimed they were single.

The 'living together' fraud cases include Zena Bailey of North-East London who raked in nearly £33,000 while masquerading as a lone mother.

She was jailed for a year in February by Snaresbrook Crown Court when police discovered cards addressed to her and her partner at the couple's home and her partner's clothes in her wardrobe.

In May, Suzie Dwyer of Liverpool claimed nearly £103,000 as a single mother but was jailed for 16 months alongside her supposed landlord Paul Campbell. It emerged that Campbell was in fact her partner and father of her three children.

Karen McCormack of Highgate, North London, was jailed for two years in February after failing to declare she was living with her partner and father of her two children. While claiming benefit, she also neglected to tell the authorities about an £80,000 inheritance she had received.

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Jailed: Suzie Dwyer

come clean about an address change will have to repay the money they owe and face extra punishment, depending on the scale of their offending.

Those caught by the taskforce face prosecution, fines and possible imprisonment.

David Gauke, a Tory junior Treasury minister, said: 'This Government will not tolerate money which