

Blitz on benefit cheat hotspots

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AREAS identified as benefit cheat hotspots are to be targeted by an intensive advertising campaign asking people to report on their neighbours.

Hoardings featuring Google maps are to be used by the government, with slogans urging people to turn in their neighbours.

One will say: "They are claiming benefits and getting cash in hand — do something about it. Help us catch benefit cheats one street at a time." Facebook ads will also urge people to report on their neighbours.

The campaign, beginning in the new year, will be piloted in areas including Southwark and Hounslow in London, Burnley and Blackpool in Lancashire, Cardiff and Glasgow.

The campaign follows an outcry over the "go home or face arrest" advertising vans that drove around London boroughs with high numbers of immigrants. The vans were halted after they were condemned by Labour as a nasty gimmick.

The Department for Work and Pensions said the benefit fraud blitz was different from the vans and "sophisticated". But it is expected to anger residents of the districts targeted.

Investigators have found that a number of foreign gangs involved in people trafficking, drug smuggling and gun running are also operating sophisticated benefits fraud schemes.

Iain Duncan Smith, the work and pensions secretary, said: "They are eyeing benefits as a part of their empires and we are working to stop them in their tracks."