

Mennie Joanne DWP COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE

From: [REDACTED] DWP PRESS OFFICE
Sent: 01 September 2014 11:48
To: [REDACTED] DWP PRESS OFFICE
Subject: FW: Fraud Excuses Story

From: [REDACTED] DWP PRESS OFFICE
Sent: 29 August 2014 13:59
To: [REDACTED]@dailymail.co.uk'
Subject: RE: Fraud Excuses Story

Hi [REDACTED]

Yes, all those measures mentioned at the bottom of the release came into effect April this year.

Let me know if I can help with anything else.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] DWP PRESS OFFICE
Sent: 29 August 2014 10:31
To: [REDACTED]@dailymail.co.uk'
Subject: Fraud Excuses Story

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks for your time on the phone just now.

Attached is the press release for the Fraud Excuses story we're putting out for tomorrow. Please note the embargo for 00:01 Saturday 30th August.

Let me know if I can help with anything else.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]

<< File: Top ten benefit fraud excuses Press Release.docx >>

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Please consider the environment before printing

1977-1978

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1988-1989

1989-1990

Top ten benefit fraud excuses revealed

- Being a secret service agent, having a "gay husband", fearing being chased by a landlady with a sex toy and needing money for a wedding buffet feature among the excuses;
- Government says the days when people thought they can cheat the system and not get caught are "well and truly over".

The government has released some of the most stupid excuses for committing benefit fraud, to underline the ridiculous lengths some people have gone to avoid being brought to justice.

Benefit fraud accounts for around £1bn of taxpayer's money, but is now the lowest it's ever been – with fraud investigators recovering around £900million last year from convicted people's estates. That's £60million more than the previous year.

Ministers say new measures, including greater use of the Proceeds of Crime Act - to force the confiscation of fraudster's assets - are deterring would-be fraudsters.

Work and Pensions Minister Mark Harper said: "These excuses underscore the pitiable lengths some people go to try to justify what everyone knows is illegal behaviour. Underneath the heightened sense of imagination of some of these people are hardened criminals who know their time is up."

"We're clamping down on fraud – both at home and abroad – so money goes to those who need it most - rather than lining the pockets of liars who choose to ignore the rules of society. We're toughening up the system, and as part of our long-term economic plan, are reforming the benefit system and working more closely with employers and local authorities to make sure cheats have nowhere to hide."

The top ten excuses given by benefit fraudsters last year were:

1. A doctor, who had written several books on UFO sightings, said he only stole £100,000 in benefits because he was an MI5 undercover agent. His Spanish villa, where he had been claiming out-of-work benefits for scores of fictitious people, was actually a "base for fellow agents";
2. One woman told a jury she had wrongly clicked the "no, I'm not working" box on the benefit form because she had a temporary "an out-of-body experience" which led her to click wrong buttons;
3. One man confessed he had not declared he was working while claiming housing benefit so that he could pay back some money he owed his landlady, as she was chasing "payment in kind". He told the investigator he still quivered at the thought of being chased by his landlady in high heels and branding a sex toy;
4. Asked at interview why she had claimed Income Support for being a lone parent only the day after getting married, one woman replied that she had fallen out of love with her new husband and "needed the money to pay for the wedding buffet";

5. A judge opined that one fraudster had a "very clever dog" after the defendant told the jury he wasn't aware that the cheques he was cashing each month from the council was actually housing benefit - because all his other mail was "eaten by his poodle";
6. When trying to claim housing benefit as a single parent, one woman said her husband didn't live with her but in a tent in the back yard. When a Google Maps search revealed the house had no garden, she withdrew her claim;
7. One mother defended her daughter's failure to declare £30,000 which she had won on the game show 'Deal or No Deal' whilst on Income Support, by saying it didn't matter because she had given it all away to a drug dealer;
8. A security guard defended himself for claiming Jobseeker's Allowance whilst working at a night-club - telling fraud investigators he "thought he was allowed to work nights and still claim";
9. A wife told a court that she never told the authorities of the tens of thousands of pounds of housing benefit her husband was claiming illegally - by pretending he lived alone - because she had "always thought he was gay".
10. When a man claiming the highest rate of Disability Living Allowance for being "house-bound" and riddled with arthritis, was caught working as a JCB operator on a building site, he said he didn't think his work mattered because his mate transported him around the site so he never had to walk on the uneven ground.

Richard West, Director, DWP Fraud and Error Service, said: "Our fraud investigators have been given greater powers to prevent and deter people from committing benefit fraud. These cases should send a clear message to any criminals cheating the system that it doesn't matter where they are we have the means to catch them.

"Anyone found guilty of fraud will have to pay the stolen money back, and under tougher new rules they will have to do so more quickly. That's on top of any prison sentence or fine handed out by the courts."

To further counter benefit fraud, the Department for Work and Pensions is:

- Introducing tough new rules so that 40% of individuals' benefits can be taken to repay stolen cash - on top of any fine or custodial sentence handed out by the courts;
- Increasing penalties that someone committing fraud can receive from £2,000 to £5,000, without taking them to court;
- Using bailiffs to confiscate high-value possessions from convicted benefit fraudsters;
- Continuing to roll out Universal Credit to more sites, which is expected to reduce fraud by £1 billion in 5 years when it is fully in place across the country;
- Checking Jobseeker's Allowance claims against PAYE reported in real time to highlight and catch claimants that are lying about working;
- Extending the loss of benefit for offences which result in a conviction of 13 weeks for a first offence, then 26 weeks for a second offence and 3 years for a third offence;
- Introducing a new £50 civil penalty for claimants who negligently give incorrect information on their claim or fail to report a change in circumstances which results in an overpayment.

Notes to editors