

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Central Freedom of Information Team**

freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Our reference: 3348

Date: 25 August 2017

Dear Lucy Zwolinska,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 10 August 2017. You asked:

"I am interested in the National Benefit Fraud Hotline cases in the last seven years and have seen the written answer HC Deb, 5 April 2011, c748W. I am interested in the same data updated to the latest available. Therefore:

- 1. From 2010 to 2016, please provide the number of National Benefit Fraud Hotline cases that have been closed by the Fraud Investigation Service and the total number of cases closed by Customer Compliance.*
- 2. For the same time period please also provide a) the total number of these cases where error was found, b) the total number of these cases which received a fraud sanction and c) the total number of criminal convictions as a result of these cases.*

Should any part of this request be undeliverable due to cost or practical considerations, please give top priority to providing the most recent figures and to the volumes of cases closed."

DWP Response:

The Counter Fraud and Compliance Directorate (CFCD), part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for the prevention, detection and where appropriate, investigation of Fraud and Error against all benefits administered by DWP. As DWP takes fraud and its responsibility to protect tax payers' money seriously, we investigate every allegation made to us although many will result in no fraudulent activity having taken place or no evidence of fraud being detected.

The National Benefit Fraud Hotline (NBFH) was established in 2003 and the information that is given to us by members of the public is key to many of our benefit fraud investigations. Where evidence is obtained to substantiate a suspected benefit fraud, appropriate action is taken.

The information in the table below is derived from operational processes and systems designed solely for the purposes of helping the Department to manage its business. As it was never the Department's intention to put this

information into the public domain, it has not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance checks applied to our published official statistics. As the DWP holds the information, we have released it. However, it is possible information may change due to operational reasons and we recommend that caution be applied when using it.

The data has been provided to respond to this specific request regarding NBFH only statistics and must not be compared to any other data obtained.

The number of cases prosecuted in court may not directly relate to the number of convictions in the same year and therefore the data cannot be directly compared. This is due to the length of time it can take for some cases to conclude which may span more than one year.

From 2012/13 the system of recording the number of prosecutions changed. From this reporting year onwards the only prosecutions recorded are ones that were accepted by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for prosecution. It does not include the ones that were passed to the CPS, but were then rejected.

A criminal penalty is pursued in all cases where the standard of evidence meets the prosecutable standard and it is in the public interest.

Not all cases will be put before the Courts.

Less serious frauds can be dealt with by administrative penalties where it is cost effective to do so. Re-offenders may however be prosecuted.

An administrative penalty can be offered where the overpayment is more £50 and less than £2,000 and is an additional financial penalty (30% of the gross overpayment) over and above repayment of benefit for offences committed prior to 08 May 2012. For offences committed after 08 May 2012 there is a minimum penalty of £350 or 50% of the overpayment, whichever is greater (up to a maximum penalty of £2,000). The customer does not have to admit the offence but if the administrative penalty is refused the Department may proceed to prosecution.

Cautions are only offered for offences committed before 01 April 2012. Offenders must admit the offence and consent to be cautioned. If a caution is refused the Department may proceed to prosecution, and if subsequently prosecuted for another benefit offence the formal caution can be cited in court. During 2012 the number of cautions reduced as a consequence of a strategic move by the Fraud Investigation Service (a predecessor to the DWP Fraud and Error Service and CFCD) to focus on higher value frauds.

In Scotland cautions are known as administrative cautions and cannot be cited in court, but may be referred to in reports to the procurator fiscal for consideration of prosecution of any subsequent offence.

All other cases are referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for criminal prosecution

The following totals have been rounded to the nearest 50

TABLE 1

Year	Total number of NBFH cases closed by LSI	Total number of NBFH cases closed by LSC
2010	25,500	61,250
2011	29,600	60,600
2012	24,400	49,950
2013	22,500	46,900
2014	18,450	33,150
2015	24,600	29600
2016	27,450	39,600

TABLE 2

The following totals have been rounded to the nearest 50

Year	LSI Error Detected	LSC Error detected	Cautions	Ad Pen	Prosecutions
2010	4000	8100	1150	500	850
2011	4800	9400	1350	550	1050
2012	4100	7300	650	450	1000
2013	2800	7200	50	200	1000
2014	2150	5100	-	200	800
2015	1650	4650	-	200	500
2016	1750	7150	-	200	300

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LSC – Local Service Compliance

LSI – Local Service Investigations

Ad Pen – Administrative Penalty

Please note the time taken to investigate each case is different and a case may be recorded as closed in an operational year different to that in which it was recorded as opened. The number of cases recorded as opened in any operational year cannot therefore be compared directly to the number recorded as closed in the same period.

Thank you for your enquiry and I trust the points above provide the information you requested.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central FoI Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dpw.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP, Central FoI Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF www.ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745