

Working together to combat benefit fraud



Reporting benefit fraud can stop money being taken from the people who need it most

Surrey Heath Borough Council's fight against benefit fraud stepped up a gear earlier this year when new measures introduced by the Welfare Reform Act

extended the powers local authorities have to investigate and prosecute benefit fraud. Prior to April 2008 the council's investigations team was only allowed to take action against fraud relating to benefits administered by Surrey Heath, such as housing and council tax benefit.

However the new ruling means that local authorities can now prosecute and investigate on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), broadening their remit to areas such as incapacity benefit and income support and giving them the ability to investigate the full extent of fraud.

As a direct result of joint working with the DWP, Surrey Heath Borough Council is in the process of preparing three cases for court where the overpayment is in excess

of £2,000. In cases of overpayments below £2,000, the council will consider an administrative penalty of 30% of the overpayment or a formal caution. In all cases, full repayment of the amount overpaid is sought.

Investigations manager at Surrey Heath Julia Greenfield said: "Working with partners is one of Surrey Heath Borough Council's key priorities and our joint working with the DWP is a really good example of how this can lead to a better use of resources and a more effective service."

As well as investigating benefit fraud, Surrey Heath's investigation team also monitors and investigates internal matters to ensure that all council activity is conducted to the highest standards of probity.

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MONEY**

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