



Home Office

Baroness Williams

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

BY EMAIL ONLY
Lord Rosser
House of Lords

15th December 2021

Dear Richard,

At Lord Sharkey's QSD on Financial Fraud, I committed to follow up in writing to you on action taken during the pandemic with accompanying facts and figures.

As I said during the debate, it is vital we protect people from fraud, particularly those who are vulnerable to these opportunistic and harmful crimes. We have unfortunately seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic fraudsters exploiting people's fear and unease for financial gain and this is unacceptable. That is why the Home Office is working across government, law enforcement and the private sector to better protect the public, reduce the impact on victims, and ensure fraudsters are brought to justice.

One way that we are delivering on this commitment is through Project OTELLO, a national campaign co-ordinated by the National Economic Crime Centre (NECC) and City of London Police (CoLP) to target four of the highest harm frauds such as courier fraud and romance fraud. This campaign quickly pivoted to address threats including fake and unregulated personal protection equipment and Bounce Bank Loan Scheme and became our fraud response to the pandemic. Over the past year, the campaign has delivered:

- The recovery of over 27,000 fake self-test kits and over 112,00 face masks, working with Public Health England (PHE), Border Force, and Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).
- The prevention of COVID-19 fraud valued of up to £142m through analysis on potential suppliers to the NHS.
- 130 arrests on courier fraud.

In parallel to Project OTELLO, we have also been working closely with CoLP to monitor the number of COVID-19 related fraud cases being reported to the police. At present, this equates to approximately 1% of all crime reporting to Action Fraud in September 2021, with total vaccine related fraud currently at 1,632 reports as of the 30th

September. Whilst these numbers remain very low, we continue to work with health and law enforcement partners to track and mitigate this threat.

As well as our operational response to the pandemic, the Government has also sought to inform the public on how to protect themselves. This has included launching a GOV.UK page which contains easy-to-follow steps to avoid scams that can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-fraud-and-cyber-crime>. We are also working with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) on their Suspicious Email Reporting Service. This service makes it easier and effective for members of the public to report suspicious emails and since its launch last year, it has shut down over 68,000 scams as of November 2021.

As we navigate through the pandemic, it is our ongoing priority to protect the public from these crimes and make it harder for fraudsters to operate.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan', written in a cursive style.

Baroness Williams of Trafford
Minister of State for Delivery