



The Trafficking of Children for Benefit Fraud

Amber Alert

This Amber Alert is issued by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in conjunction with our partners in law enforcement and HM Government. It is based on assessed intelligence and warns of dangers and threats from serious organised criminality. It is devised with the aim of bringing about preventative or remedial action. We recommend you use this Alert to complement existing knowledge and support ongoing improvements to your business processes and procedures.



Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

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The Trafficking of Children for Benefit Fraud

This Alert is issued by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in conjunction with other law enforcement partners. It concerns risks to children trafficked into the United Kingdom for the purposes of benefit fraud. The Alert is aimed primarily at staff within the admissions offices of schools and other educational establishments. It is issued in order to improve the detection of child trafficking for the purposes of benefit fraud and encourage the implementation of proactive preventative measures. CEOP recommend you use this Alert to complement existing knowledge and support ongoing improvements to your business processes and procedures.

February 2012

The Trafficking of Children for Benefit Fraud

Overview

Increasing numbers of children are being trafficked to facilitate a range of benefit frauds in the UK. The safety and welfare of these children is of principle concern. CEOP and other law enforcement partners wish to take action against the individuals behind this form of child exploitation.

This document provides a number of indicators to help professionals identify children who may have been trafficked into the UK for the purposes of benefit fraud and adults involved in their exploitation. It also outlines the action you should take if you suspect a child has been trafficked.

Suggested Course of Action

If you know or suspect a child is the victim of human trafficking or they display the indicators included in this Alert, you should, in the first instance, alert children's services and contact your local police force. Child trafficking is a form of child exploitation and victims must be safeguarded as a matter of priority.

If you require any additional guidance on identifying and safeguarding a child trafficking victim, contact the NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL). You can do this either by telephoning 0800 107 7057 or by emailing ctail@nspcc.org.uk.

Information Report

CEOP and the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) work to safeguard and protect children who are trafficked into the UK for the purposes of benefit fraud. The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) works to tackle organised criminals involved in fraud, including those exploiting trafficked children.

Working with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), which administers tax and welfare benefits, this Alert forms part of the approach to tackle those involved in child benefit fraud. In particular, this Alert focuses on adults who exploit children to facilitate fraudulent claims of Child Benefit and Working Tax Credits.

Such benefit payments are managed via the postal service so face to face interviews with claimants are rarely conducted, making it difficult to detect fraudulent activity. HMRC will often seek to verify if a claim is genuine by checking if a child has been registered at a local school and doctor's surgery.

Child traffickers are aware of these checks and often place a child in a school for a short period of time before removing them. In some instances where enquiries have been made in relation to the whereabouts of non-attending/withdrawn children, they have been returned to the school. In other cases children have been registered at schools with long waiting lists. This process generates a school or local authority letter which is used to facilitate fraudulent claims.

Indicators

The following indicators may assist you in identifying potentially fraudulent activity; this list is not exhaustive. **These indicators are intended as a guide only, and no single indicator should be regarded as evidence of trafficking for the purposes of benefit fraud. Concerns should be raised where a cluster of these indicators appear together:**

- The relationship between the adult and child is unclear
- No proof of the purported relationship between the adult and the child
- A single 'responsible adult' has registered a number of children
- A single address has been used for a number of children

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- A lack of identity documents for a child, or the identity documentation used to register the child is poor or old, for example a passport showing a picture of the child as an infant
- There is evidence of numerous applications to different schools
- A child refers to an apparent parent as cousin, uncle, auntie, etc
- After registering or following a short period of attendance at a school, a child is withdrawn from the school or ceases to attend
- A carer informs a school that they are moving but provides no forwarding address and there are no details of registration with another school
- A child is frequently picked up from school by persons other than the notified 'parents'.
- If a child's carer is not the parent is evidence provided that they have written consent from the parent or a private fostering assessment to care for the child?

Indicators that may be present during a home visit:

- Unclear relationship between adult and child
- The adult/s present are all male or multiple males with a lone female
- The children's ages appear less than nine months apart or there are many children of a similar age present
- The property appears to be overcrowded, or there are an abnormally large number of children living at the address.
- There are documents relating to numerous children, such as benefit claims, school applications, passports, etc and possibly for more than the number of children living at the address
- If a child is missing, there are inconsistencies in accounts of their whereabouts
- There are lots of minor inconsistencies and evasion when facts are requested
- A child's 'responsible adult' fails to answer questions or provide evidence that they are official carers for a child

A full list of indicators relating to child trafficking is available in the London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit and guidance.

Reporting suspicions to UKHTC

If you have alerted Children's Services and the local police force and wish to report an adult suspected of involvement in a case of child trafficking to the UKHTC, please email ukhtc@soca.x.gsi.gov.uk and providing as much information as possible, including:

- What has happened to raise your concerns and the name of the school, the dates the child(ren) first attended and the date any absence started
- The names, dates of birth, nationalities, addresses and contact telephone numbers of the child(ren)'s alleged parents/guardians. Any other incidental information that you hold which could be useful, such as the names and addresses of any interpreters used or details of vehicles used by those involved
- Contact details within your own organisation for this case and contact details for the agencies you have informed of the case

Feedback

The Alerts process is a method by which CEOP provides information to external organisations. To help us to improve this service, we would welcome any feedback you have on both this product and the information provided to you. Please email all feedback to strategic.unit@ceop.gsi.gov.uk.

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Reducing harm – Providing information back to SOCA/CEOP

We would like to remind you of the provisions contained in Section 34 Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. These provisions say that any information provided by you to SOCA, in order to assist SOCA to discharge its functions which include the prevention and detection of crime, will not breach any obligation of confidence which you may owe to any third party or any other restriction on the disclosure of information. S34 requires that disclosures of personal information about living individuals by you to SOCA must still comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA), but you may be satisfied that disclosure by you of such personal information to SOCA in order to assist SOCA to prevent and detect crime is permitted by the DPA. Please, therefore, submit all S34 information to alerts@soca.x.gsi.gov.uk

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