Message

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Sent: 17/03/2020 20:52:37
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CC: Lyn Mcdonald [lyn.mcdonald@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; Laura Eshelby [laura.eshelby@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; NR NR @homeoffice.gov.uk]; NR @nca.gov.uk; Rich Wentel [rich.wentel@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
Subject: Urgent - Fraud and the Covid 19 Response

Dear all,

We find ourselves in challenging times.

I had hoped to be writing to you in early April to talk about how we continue to develop the Government's Counter Fraud Function, and increasingly make sure that our combined expert advice on fraud and economic crime is available to those at the heart of government when shaping future policy, as well as continuing to develop our own capability to fight fraud through initiatives such as the Counter Fraud Profession and our new Counter Fraud Investigation apprenticeship.

Sadly, national and worldwide events have overtaken us and we find ourselves in a very different context to when I landed back from Australia over a month ago.

I am now reaching out to you in terms of how we come together to help the government effectively deal with the Covid-19 pandemic - the government's main priority.

You will have picked up from the news, and our internal public sector commentary, that this increasingly being coordinated through Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, hand in glove with our colleagues in other departments and agencies.

There is no doubt that the government will have to spend a lot of money quickly to deal with Covid 19. We are creating a lot of procurements and policies at pace. There is also no doubt that there are a lot of vulnerable members of our communities who can be taken advantage of. You will already have your own experiences, but having just come back from Australia and the BushFire Crisis, I am under no doubt that these circumstances bring with them an especially high risk of, and instances of, fraudulent behaviour - from the minor acts to systematic abuse.

We are being asked to build an understanding of the picture across those working to fight economic crime in government of the activity the public sector to help reduce the risk and volume of fraud during this crisis - both against the public sector and wider.

In the last day we have stood up a team in the Centre to help coordinate this. Our main objective is to make sure there is a coherent picture across government that can be provided to the leads at the centre to remind them this is an issue, show what is happening on it and give them an awareness of any risks.

For me this is about showing all of our combined efforts and how we can come together at a time of national crisis like this to show a unified voice. I know you all and I know we are all passionate about fighting fraud, this feels like a great opportunity to show our combined capability.

In doing this, I am really keen to avoid duplication. I am sure that you as the senior leads across government on this will have started doing your own work. For instance, I know that, Karen, the City has been great in getting fraud alerts on scams out already. We have been receiving feeds from our contacts in the fraud community on the types of things they are seeing or expecting in the Covid-19 response.

We are not here to interfere. We are here to understand the wider picture and make sure those at the heart of government during this crisis are aware.

Our starter for 10 on the type of things we (ie. you and us collectively) may want a feel for are:

1. A common understanding the context - How the evolving situation may be leading to fraud 'scams' and risk to both the public, businesses (Home Office colleagues, largely your remit) and the public sector (HMRC, DWP colleagues, largely ours)

2. Having combined confidence that the public are getting the messages to reduce their exposure to fraud at this time

3. Helping public bodies who are developing policies and activities to reduce the risks and identify fraud early

4. Having an understanding of how Public sector resourcing levels (as they are affected by Covid-19) are impacting the our ability to find and fight fraud

I would ask that you respond to this email in the next day to let me know your thoughts.

My one ask is that we are not teritorial on this. I am not precious about what my team does or doesn't do, and we certainly don't want to take over anything or tell you how to do things.

What the situation is asking for is that somewhere in government there is an understanding of the total picture on fraud and economic crime in this crisis, so it can be called upon either to give confidence, or to make clear the problems.

If we are agreed, I am keen that we or some of your key personnel, form a psuedo board. Where we share the picture as it develops, including things like, evolving scams to the public and new areas of public spending at risk and the action we are taking together to deal with it.

Thank you all, I look forward to hearing from you.