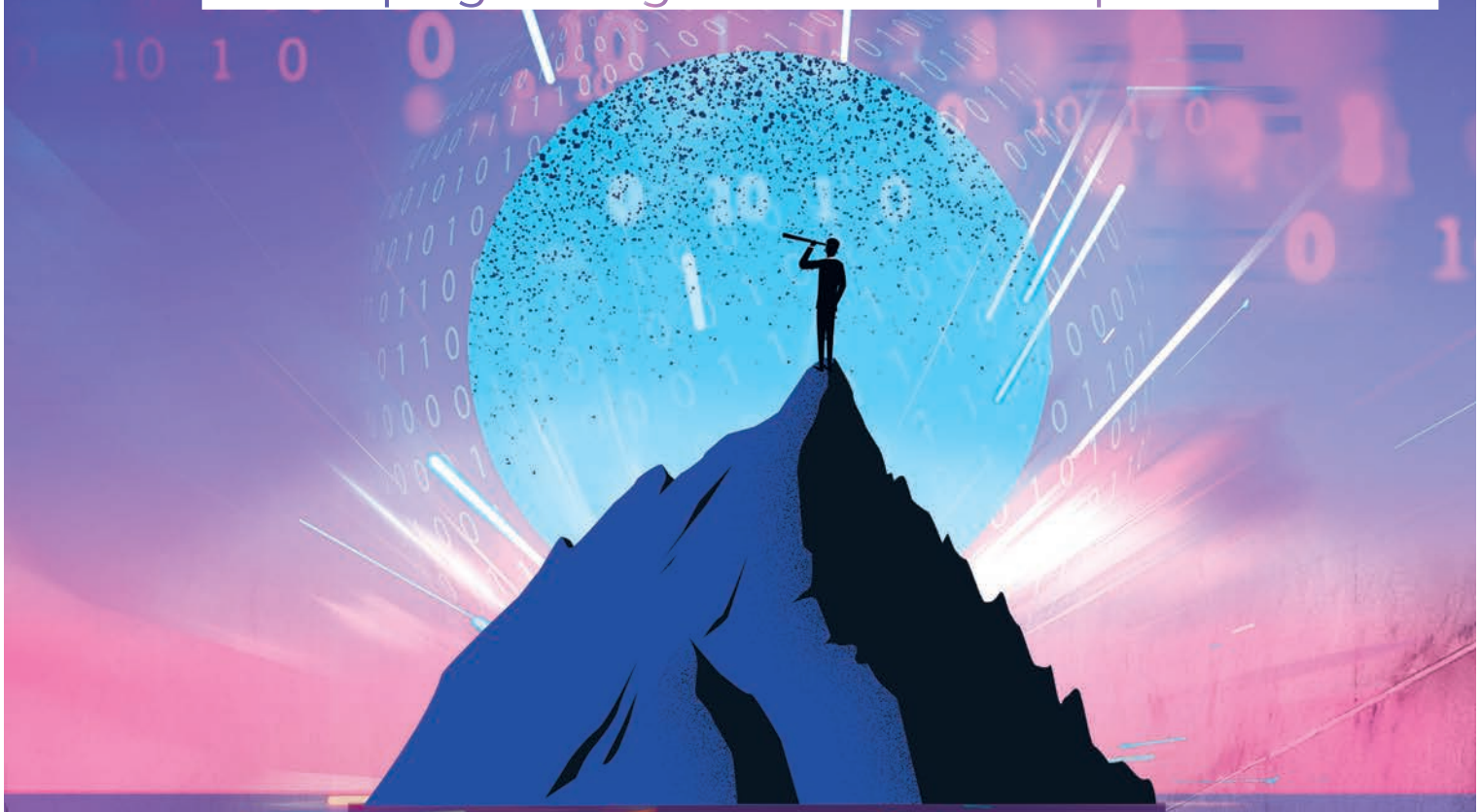
Issue 11
Autumn 2023

nfi
National Fraud Initiative

Item 15a
For Discussion and Noting

NFI MATTERS

Developing strategies to detect and prevent fraud



Join us in our vision to better protect public bodies from fraud

Inside this issue:

THE 2022 NFI SURVEY - 'YOU SAID, WE DID'

THE NFI 2024-28 STRATEGY

IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE NEXT NFI MORTALITY SCREENING

LATEST NEWS ON THE NFI PILOT PIPELINE

Welcome to the 11th issue of NFI Matters

It's been a busy few months since the last issue of NFI Matters. There has been the release of the final matches for 2022/23, the commencement of the HMRC data share, a number of pilots launched, developing our strategy for 2024-28 and the re-procurement of the Data Matching and IT services contract commenced on 27 July, with the publication of the Prior Information Notice. This has all been happening alongside our continual engagement with you; training 128 Key Contacts, discussing outcomes recording and updates to the web application.

The outcomes you have recorded are already over £100 million for April to August 2023, so we can see you are really working hard to stop fraud and error. If you need specific investigations support, I would recommend you refer to the article, in this issue, that sets out what our IT partner, Synectics Solutions can offer via their Special Investigations Unit.

As the Public Sector Fraud Authority (PSFA) NFI Team has some new members, we have included a graphic so you can see who we are and where we are based.

The PSFA was given a target of saving £180m in its first year, of which the NFI contributed a significant proportion.

Later this year, the PSFA will publish its first annual report into the impact it has had on tackling fraud.

Our aim is to provide you with a user-friendly web application so if there is something that's been frustrating you for a while, please report it via our Helpdesk.

You will also find details of forthcoming training sessions and conferences where we will be represented.

Also included in this issue of NFI Matters:

- *2024-2028 NFI Strategy*
- *2022 NFI Survey - Key messages*
- *Important dates for the next NFI Mortality Screening*
- *An update on Council Tax Single Person Discount data matching;*
- *Our Pilot Pipeline*
- *Our partnerships in action - Synectics Solutions Special Investigations Unit*
- *And more...*

We are always on hand to answer your queries or hear your views and opinions, so please get in touch either by email or call us. If you are new to the NFI, please get in touch so we can ensure you have all the information you need to have a successful experience.

Yvonne Addison

Head of Operational Delivery, Cabinet Office

contents

in this issue...

4 Meet the Public Sector Fraud Authority NFI Team

User Engagement Update

Upcoming Conferences

5 Mortality Screening - an additional service helping you ensure your benefits and services remain protected against overpayments

6 The NFI 2022 Survey - 'You said, we did'

7 The NFI 2024 - 2028 Strategy

8 The NFI Pilot Pipeline

9 Focus on Partnerships in action: Synectics Solutions Special Investigations Unit (SIU)

10 Council Tax Single Person Discount (CTSPD)

11 FraudHub from the NFI

12 How AppCheck can benefit you

Update on HMRC matches

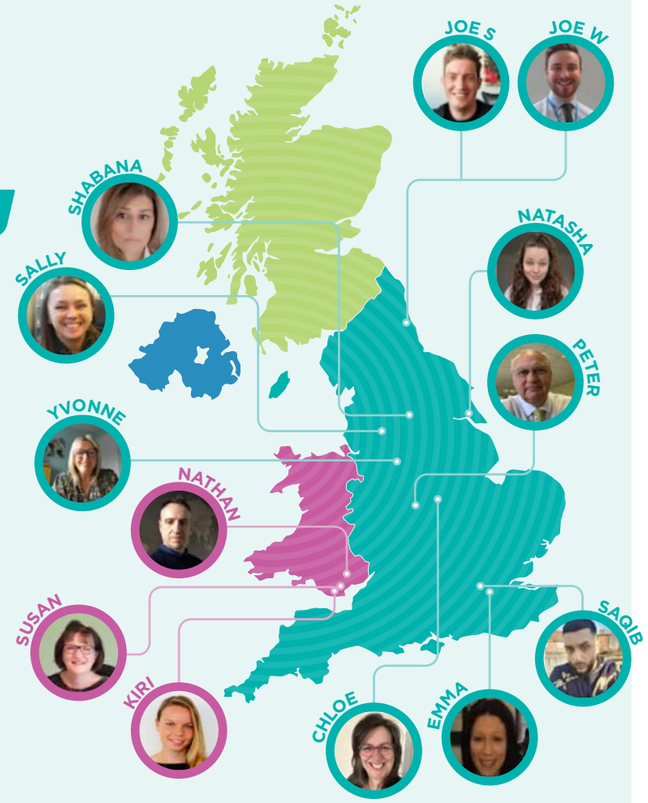
Meet the *Public Sector Fraud Authority NFI Team*

We are a tight-knit team made up of people with diverse backgrounds and experiences, who bring a whole range of different skills, technical knowledge and expertise. We strive to build up a reputation as a team with a strong track record of delivering savings and building trust with our stakeholders.

Our team has a rich background of experience which include counter-fraud investigators, accountants, auditors, analysts, project managers, policy and stakeholders experts.

Our team operates across the UK, take a look at where we are.

Go to **www.nfi.gov.uk//Contact** to find out about our roles and contact details.



User Engagement Update

KEY CONTACT TRAINING

We have delivered 12 sessions of Key Contact training to 128 participants between January and July 2023, using Microsoft Teams. The sessions combined slides and a live demonstration of the NFI secure web application, providing a guided walkthrough with the opportunity to ask questions.

Participants completed a post-event survey to help us identify improvements for future sessions. 92% of participants have rated the sessions as 'good - excellent'.

The training sessions provided an overview of several core elements of the NFI secure web application, including:

- Setting up new users and permissions
- Reviewing reports
- Reviewing matches
- Recording outcomes
- Navigating the NFI secure web application with some useful tips
- Using the guidance section for help and support.

PLANNED SESSIONS **COMING SOON:**

- Web Application User Training
- Management Information Training
- Key Contact Training

If you would like to register your interest in these, or suggest another area that you would like us to cover, please email **shabana.younis @cabinetoffice.gov.uk.**

Upcoming conferences

We attend a lot of conferences and often have a stand. It's always great to meet with our participants and answer queries or talk in general about all things NFI.

If you want to let us know you are attending so we can schedule a catch up, email **susan.baker@cabinetoffice.gov.uk** and we can put you in touch with the attending team member. Alternatively track us down when you are there!

The next conferences are:

- ***The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) Annual Conference and Exhibition:*** 4-6 October 2023 - The International Centre, Telford
- ***Annual Oxford Investigations Fraud Conference:*** 21 November 2023 - Oxford Town Hall, Oxford
- ***Counter Fraud Conference 2024:*** 22 February 2024 - QEII Centre, Westminster, London

Mortality Screening –

an additional service helping you ensure your benefits and services remain protected against overpayments

MORTALITY SCREENING - helping you ensure your benefits, services and housing stock remain protected against mortality fraud

The Office for National Statistics have confirmed that, in the first six months of 2023 alone, there were over 310,000 deaths registered in England and Wales, compared to 289,000 deaths during the same period in 2022.

There is a serious risk that criminals, determined to commit fraud, will take advantage in times of devastation and upheaval following the death of a family member. In some cases, it can be the surviving family members who may choose to take advantage of the situation by failing to report a death with the intention of securing additional benefits for themselves or misappropriating a pension. In other cases, dishonest individuals may try to obtain a social housing property that ordinarily should be passed back to the Local Authority or Housing Association to provide housing for other families in need.

Since January 2023, NFI deceased data matches have ***helped NFI participants to detect and prevent over £50 million in fraud***, error and overpayments.

For as little as ***£400***, you can access refreshed mortality screening data so you can continue to protect your services

DATA FOR THE NEXT MORTALITY SCREENING IS REQUIRED NO LATER THAN 24 NOVEMBER 2023

The NFI offers two mortality screening services:

1: Mortality Screening via the National Exercise - DWP screening every 6 months

Twice a year, we access the deceased persons file held by the DWP. This data also contains National Insurance numbers which can be used as a matching field alongside name, date of birth and address. The data also holds details of some British Citizens who have died abroad, and this has proven very successful particularly when administering pensions. Data is uploaded through the 2022/23 National Exercise - Data File Upload tool.

DATES TO REMEMBER: 24 NOVEMBER 2023 - DATA SUBMISSION DEADLINE FOR DWP SCREENING

2: Mortality Screening via ReCheck - On demand Disclosure of Death Registration Information (DDRI)

We are in the unique position to have access to the Disclosure of Death Registration Information from the General Registrar. You can screen against DDRI at any time and results are usually available on the web application the same day. Data is uploaded through the ReCheck, Data File Upload tool. Data is refreshed every two weeks and the latest refresh date can be found under ReCheck, Product Information, Available Matching Options.

Fees for the above services can be found on our GOV.UK page **www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-fraud-initiative** or search for 'National Fraud Initiative' in your web browser.

If you wish to submit data for the DWP screening, please email **helpdesk@nfi.gov.uk** or call **0845 345 8019** to register your interest.

THE 2022 NFI SURVEY

'You Said, we did'

The NFI is committed to improving engagement with users to better understand and meet customer needs. The NFI's 2022 survey allowed our users to have their say on the current services and the future direction of the NFI.

Our team analysed the results of the survey and found **three thematic areas to target** our efforts for improvements across 2023.

Now, we want to take the opportunity to highlight some of the work we've done under each of these themes to address your feedback:

Highlighting some of our successes from our 2022 survey:

76% of respondents agreed that the NFI **supports the delivery of their organisation's anti-fraud strategy**;

69% of respondents agreed that the NFI is **valuable in demonstrating that their organisation's controls and compliance are robust**

65% of respondents scored a minimum of 8 or more (out of 10) for their level of **confidence that their organisation had identified its key fraud risks**.

Customer Engagement

You said

Only 50% of respondents agreed that the NFI is customer focused, generally noting that two-way communication should be greater.

We Did

Enhancing the frequency of key contact training and demos (e.g. we have delivered 12 sessions for 128 attendees so far this year);

Offering more on-site visits to discuss our services; and

Producing our bi-annual 'NFI Matters' to highlight customer-focused developments.

Intended Outcomes

Increased confidence in the ability of the NFI to reach out and engage with its customers; and

Further collaboration opportunities with our customers.

Future Work Priorities

You said

A number of respondents noted that the NFI website was not user friendly and could be redesigned to improve accessibility

We Did

In May, the newly designed FraudHub was released, with improvements to the usability and design of web pages - e.g. Matches and Referrals, Data FraudHub Upload and Fraud Hub Admin pages.

Feedback from users has been positive thus far and we are keen for further feedback to support any future design improvements. We are working to extend this to AppCheck, ReCheck and eventually the National Exercise.

Intended Outcomes

Ensure that both our more recent and historic customers agree that the NFI's website is more user-friendly; and

Encourage as much utilisation of the NFI's website, and products, as possible.

Value for Money

You Said

Only 55% of the respondents agreed that the NFI fee represented good value for money, with 15% saying that the NFI did not represent good value for money, with the remainder unsure.

We Did

Ahead of the next National Exercise, we will undertake a review of the NFI work programme and fees, considering the feedback provided through previous user engagement. Participants will be able to comment on proposals for the 2024/25 National Exercise which will be shared in Spring 2024.

The NFI is also pursuing legislative options to resume adult social care data matching, a high-risk area of fraud and error loss, driving further outcomes and value for money.

Intended Outcomes

More awareness on the benefits of the NFI's services and how they help detect and prevent fraud and error.

Don't miss our next survey!

We want to continue to hear from you directly about how to improve our services. **We will be issuing the next NFI Survey by the end of 2023** to seek your views on what is currently working well and how we can work towards further improvements.

For more information on the NFI surveys please contact **susan.baker@cabinetoffice.gov.uk**.

OUR VISION

The NFI 2024 - 2028 Strategy

As we move into 2024, the NFI is developing a four-year strategy to articulate our ambition to tackle fraud and error through improved access to data and analytics techniques and set out how we intend to work towards it. The rationale for developing our future strategy is threefold:

Providing a *vision* for our users

The NFI is committed to clearly setting out our agenda to all our stakeholders for the next four years. The strategy will be shaped by your views from the 2022 Survey, and will provide a clear vision for new participants.

A *new* organisation

Although the PSFA was only established last year, the NFI is an integral part of its ability to help modernise counter-fraud and error responses. Through our own strategy, we have an opportunity to clearly demonstrate how the NFI contributes to the PSFA agenda and continue to help further it.

Securing the right *outcomes*

The NFI is focused on delivering savings and protecting taxpayers' money. This strategy cements our continued commitment to delivering these outcomes and signals our accountability for doing so.

Based upon feedback from the NFI's 2022 Survey, we have developed the following high-level vision and strategy objectives, to help us achieve that vision.

Our Vision Statement

& 5 key objectives

"To better protect citizens from fraud and error by utilising data from the public and private sector and technology to support its detection, prevention and recovery"

- Maximise the quality and frequency of data
- Ensure that our services are efficient, sustainable and deliver value for money
- Better target and identify fraud risks through innovation and continuous improvement
- Engage and communicate effectively with our customers
- Deepen expertise and capability

PILOTS

The NFI PILOT pipeline

WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE NFI PILOTS?

If you would like to register your interest to take part in these pilots, please email **nfiqueries@nfi.gov.uk** with ***'NFI Pilot'*** in the title.

Planning stage

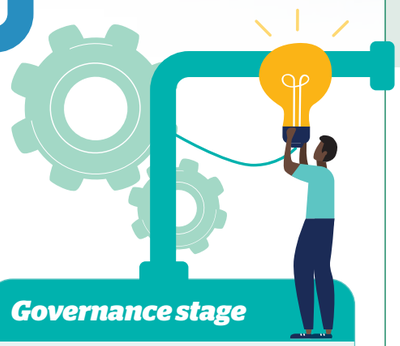
This includes research of the fraud problem, feasibility including availability of data, IT resource secured, assessment of potential outcomes and identifying pilot participants. Not all proposed pilots get through this planning stage.

We have three pilots at planning stage:

Council Tax Exemptions and Disregards

Second homes and houses in multiple occupancy

Universal Credit data to Council Tax data



Governance stage

This includes approval of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and authority from the NFI governance board to proceed. Not all pilots make it through the governance stage.

We have two pilots at governance stage:

Disabled Facilities Grants - This is matching to find potential fraud in relation to non residency of applicant and/or, multiple applications.

No Recourse to Public Funds - This is where financial support is being provided to those with no recourse to public funds, there is potential fraud here where applicants are making multiple claims or aren't entitled.

Implementation stage

This is where we get going on the pilot, produce the matches, testing, provide access to participants, provide guidance and monitor results.

We have two pilots at implementation stage:

Landlord Incentive Scheme - The scheme is designed to help tackle housing issues and encourage private landlords to provide long-term rented accommodation for those on the housing waiting list through a non refundable grant. Pilot matching is underway and will seek to identify non-entitled, impersonated and fictitious claimants. It will also help to identify landlords claiming incorrectly.

Employment Agency to Local Authority Payroll - A new data matching initiative will soon be piloted by the 22 London Fraud Hub members to target a new and emerging fraud risk; permanent employees and agency staff who are working for more than one organisation at the same time and who have failed to declare this to their current employer and/or obtaining authorisation to allow them to do it. A special thanks to Chris Keesing (City of London) and Jamie Branch (Waltham Forest) for their hard work to move this forward. We now have agreement from several large agency providers to be involved and we are aiming for the data matching to start in October 2023, with results available before the end of 2023.

Focus on Partnerships in action:

SYNECTICS SOLUTIONS

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS UNIT

Our IT partner, Synectics Solutions, runs a Special Investigations Unit (SIU) founded on the principles of providing a cost effective, tailored intelligence service based on a detailed understanding of your requirements.

The SIU provides:

- *Ad-hoc standard reports*
- *Complex fraud or organised crime group analysis*
- *Large volume, outsourced investigations*

A dedicated team of Intelligence Analysts bring together Synectics Solutions' unique data sources, award-winning analytic tools and years of investigative experience. The SIU can help provide clear, concise and National Intelligence Model compliant reports, giving unique insight into an individual or company based on our unique access to National SIRA and public sector data.

The SIU can compliment your in-house resources and expertise and can also:

- Reduce the workload on your in-house investigations team
- Expedite high priority cases
- Manage workload peaks
- Enrich on-going investigations

With a great track record of delivering robust fraud and financial crime prevention solutions to clients across a whole range of industries. The SIU has the skill set, knowledge and tools required to complete your most challenging investigations.

As a recent user of the SIU, here's what the London Borough of Hillingdon says:

"Collaborating with Synectics Solutions SIU has been an important step forward in combatting public sector fraud.

Following a successful pilot, our investigators can now unlock a quality and depth of intelligence not previously possible. Their success is thanks to Synectics SIU's exceptionally detailed National Intelligence Model compliant reports, which give valuable insight into each data source referenced. This ultimately provides us with actionable intelligence only available via this unique public/private sector partnership.

Pace and agility are paramount in counter fraud investigations and Synectics SIU respond quickly and diligently. I look forward to expanding our vital work combatting fraud in the London Borough of Hillingdon."

Mark O'Halloran

Counter Fraud Manager, London Borough of Hillingdon

If you are interested in using the services provided by the SIU unit, please contact **Chris.Hallett@synectics-solutions.com**

Council Tax Single Person Discount (CTSPD)

The 2023/24 Exercise will soon be underway and you will be invited to upload data from 30 November 2023.

A reminder about the NFI automated chargepayer letter tool

Once matches have been generated, do not forget that, within CTSPD reports, there is a time-saving mail merge tool that allows you to generate chargepayer follow up letters from the match data. The file of letters can be downloaded for local distribution to any individuals where you wish to check their eligibility for CTSPD. Section 11 of the guidance in the secure web app covers how to use this tool.

Once the communication has been sent:

After the period specified on the letter has elapsed or a response is received consider the following action:

If no response has been received by due date
Immediate withdrawal of SPD. Councils adopting this practice have found a significant number of claimants did not respond.

Non entitlement accepted and date notified
Where the applicant accepts their non-entitlement and provides a date when their circumstances changed, the discount is stopped immediately and entitlement backdated to the date stated by the applicant.

Efforts should be made to validate the date of change provided and any further adjustments made as a result of those enquiries. Validation methods include referring to data sources such as credit reference agencies or asking the applicant to provide further evidence to support the date provided.

Non entitlement accepted but no date notified
Where the applicant accepts their non-entitlement but has not indicated a date, the discount is stopped immediately. Further efforts should be made to establish the date when their circumstances changed.

Continued entitlement
Where the applicant confirms that they are still entitled to SPD, either through living on their own or having disregarded people in the residence, the precise justification for this should be recorded and supporting evidence secured. The Council Tax account should be updated as appropriate.

Save time and use the CTSPD Bulk Outcomes templates to upload outcomes

Don't forget you can use the 'bulk upload' template to report outcomes for a large number of matches all at once for 801, 803 and 814 reports. This is covered in our guidance in section 8 pages 16-24.

Recent CTSPD user engagement - Thank you from Chloe and Joe

Following recent engagement with a number of bodies we have seen a significant increase in outcome submissions for the 2022/23 exercise. Thank you to all those who set aside time to record the output from your hard work, that collectively will recover millions to feed back into essential services and prevent further losses.

If you need any advice or support with outcomes recording please contact **Chloe Truman** or **Joe Smith** via **nfiqueries@cabinetoffice.gov.uk**

Premium Council Tax Single Person Discount Checking Service

The NFI premium council tax single person checking service is available through the NFI ReCheck product. This premium service combines data matching and screening to give local authorities a comprehensive view of the household composition of individuals claiming this council tax discount.

For more information on this service contact **Rebekah.Peters@synectics-solutions.com** or **07936946577**

FraudHub from the NFI

nfi FraudHub

FraudHub continues to grow, with more organisations signing up each month.

Want to find out more?...

The NFI FraudHub provides local authorities and other public sector organisations within a geographical area the opportunity to collaborate and share data securely and more frequently than the biennial main NFI exercise.

FraudHub now supports eight separate fraud hubs across the UK currently ***with***

40 members.

The largest,

London FraudHub has 17 members

and a further three London boroughs have completed applications to join.

FraudHub members have been able to ***identify and record more than***

£3.9m in outcomes

between 1 April 2023 and 31 August 2023

FraudHub members screen a wide selection of their own datasets and bring in other organisations within their geographical area to share data to help identify more potential fraud and error. FraudHub enables members to submit data at any time and as new data is submitted, new matches and insight is released to all members of the hub. As new and innovative types of matching and datasets are identified, FraudHub members often have the opportunity to pilot these.

Because FraudHub falls under the matching mandate held by the NFI, there are no lengthy data sharing agreements to negotiate and maintain. Equally, there are no expensive IT costs as the product is accessed via the existing NFI Web application.

Best practice is shared every two-months in user group meetings where FraudHub members discuss their experiences and recommend development enhancements to ensure that FraudHub remains the most effective source of data to fraud investigators.

There are no tender requirements.
One annual licence fee covers all usage:

- ☑ **unlimited users;**
- ☑ **unlimited data uploads;**
- ☑ **all retrospective matching included;**
- ☑ **no charges for referrals/matches found;**
- ☑ **all training and support included; and**
- ☑ **free access to AppCheck for all subscriptions of 24 months.**

If you have any FraudHub queries - please email **Rebekah.Peters@synectics-solutions.com** *or* **Peter.caddick@cabinetoffice.gov.uk**

How AppCheck can benefit you

Reduce your losses by stopping fraud at the point of application

nfi AppCheck

Why not trial AppCheck to allow you to identify potential fraudulent or erroneous applications before they can enter your system. Helping to protect your budgets and minimise the costs of fraud and error.

Free trial

Every application you receive carries a risk that the person has failed to declare all of the relevant information and as a result they receive a benefit, service or employment they are not entitled to.

AppCheck provides instant checks against the datasets collected for the 2022/23 national exercise (with more frequent refreshes of data such as Housing Benefit and DDRI deceased data) providing your organisation with an effective fraud prevention tool. A response is returned within seconds of a search being made.

AppCheck is an online service delivered by a secure web application. There is a hierarchical user structure to control access and monitor searches that have been conducted within your organisation. This makes the product ideal for usage within counter fraud teams or by frontline operatives.

You can use AppCheck to:

- ☑ Reduce the risk of your organisation falling victim to fraud by stopping invalid or fraudulent claims at the point of application; and
- ☑ Reduce administration and future investigation costs.

AppCheck provides built-in risk flags and intelligent colour coding to make it easier to identify genuine applications or prioritise referrals for further investigation. If you require further intelligence from a credit reference agency you can request that within the tool for specific matches.

Contact Rebekah.Peters@synectics-solutions.com or 07936946577 to set up a free trial of AppCheck and discover how it could help to reduce your exposure to the risk of fraud.

Update on HMRC matches

matches should be released soon

During the 2018/19 NFI National Exercise, we shared data with HMRC for the first time under the Digital Economy Act (DEA) 2017 and the Local Audit and Accountability Act (LAAA) 2014.

Following that, we released HMRC matches between October and December 2021 as part of a follow-up pilot. The combined outcomes from all HMRC pilots totalled £14.9m. An evaluation was submitted to the DEA Review Board in December 2022 and they approved the recommendation to progress the project from pilot through to business as usual activity.

Undeclared property ownership | *Undeclared earnings & capital* | *Undeclared persons in a household*

Data has now been received from HMRC and we are in the process of matching and testing. The results should be released to you soon.

Contact us...

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Mobile numbers are available here
www.nfi.gov.uk//Contact

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Synectics Solutions
for technical queries relating to the web app:
helpdesk@nfi.gov.uk or **0845 345 8019**

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