# DWP faces backlash over plans to access benefit claimants’ bank accounts



The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is preparing to implement new powers that would allow it to access the bank accounts of benefit claimants in an effort to enhance its fraud detection measures. These proposals have sparked considerable debate within Parliament, leading to a rebellion among some Labour Party MPs who supported an amendment aimed at limiting these powers.

The DWP's initiative is positioned as part of a broader strategy to tackle benefit fraud, a move described by Labour MP Liz Kendall as essential for ensuring that taxpayers’ money is allocated effectively to those in genuine need. She stated, “Delivering our Plan for Change means ensuring every single pound of taxpayers’ money is wisely spent and goes to those in genuine need.” This plan is said to represent the most significant crackdown on fraud affecting public funds to date.

However, concerns have been raised regarding potential overreach and the implications for innocent claimants. John Milne, the Liberal Democrat MP for Horsham, expressed his apprehension, noting that “the innocent and the accidental claimants who fall into the trap” could be disproportionately affected. He further cautioned against the reliance on the DWP as a flawless authority, highlighting a track record of errors in their operations.

Neil Duncan-Jordan, another Labour MP, raised alarms about the ramifications of the legislation, which could compel banks to scrutinise financial information without the necessity of any wrongdoing being suspected. He stated, “It is the very poorest in our society which are going to be affected most by this legislation.”

DWP Minister Andrew Western defended the proposed measures, asserting that the intention is not to presume guilt but rather to facilitate better data sharing between public and private sectors. He explained that “we do require this power because it will enable better data sharing… to help check claimants are meeting the criteria for their benefits and to detect incorrect payments at an earlier stage before any suspicion of wrongdoing has arisen.”

The discussion also included perspectives from Conservative MPs. Helen Whately, a member of the Conservative Party, posed questions regarding the responsibility of social media platforms in aiding fraudulent activities. She argued that individuals convicted of fraud should not be able to retain possessions acquired through illicit means, stating, “Why should we tolerate people using social media platforms to help others commit fraud?”

As this debate continues, stakeholders are assessing how these proposed changes could reshape the landscape of benefits in the UK, especially in terms of the balance between necessary oversight and the risk of undue scrutiny on vulnerable populations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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