

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS HOUSING & CUSTOMER SERVICES

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TRADING STANDARDS PROSECUTION

A builder who committed fraud and left people without their life savings has been jailed for more than two years following a major trading standards investigation. The trader, who was trading from Cavendish Street, Darwen, pleaded guilty to fraud and bankruptcy offences.

He would promise his clients that he would do work for them but that he needed money up front so he could purchase the materials needed to complete the work – and owed between £36,000 to £38,000 for work not carried out.

He admitted to carrying on a business with intent to defraud his creditors and being a bankrupt and obtaining credit over the prescribed amount - namely £14,353 - without giving the person he obtained the credit from the relevant information about his status.

At Preston Crown Court he was jailed for 27 months for the fraud, and for 12 months (concurrent) for the bankruptcy offence.

HOUSING STANDARDS PROSECUTION

A landlord who allegedly unlawfully evicted a tenant has been found guilty following a Housing Standards investigation. He was investigated following a complaint made to the council by a tenant who was locked out of their rented accommodation in Blackburn along with their belongings. They were not allowed to return to the property.

The landlord pleaded not guilty but was convicted at Blackburn Magistrates Court. He was sentenced to £250 fine and £25 victim surcharge and ordered to pay £3000 towards the Council's costs. He has appealed against conviction; the appeal will be heard at Burnley Crown Court in due course.

SELECTIVE LICENSING PROSECUTION

A landlord who failed to apply for a licence within one of the Council's selective licensing areas was recently re-tried on the landlords request and found guilty.

The landlord pleaded guilty to Blackburn Magistrates Court for renting out a property within the Darwen Selective licensing area without obtaining a licence. He was sentenced to pay £240 fine. £24 victim surcharge, £400 contribution to the council for the licence fee and £990 costs to the council.

Since the court appearance the Council has successfully obtained a Rent Repayment Order to recover housing benefit paid to the landlord whilst it was rented out without a licence. Under the Rent Repayment Order the landlord is required to pay back a total of £3306.13 in housing benefit to the Council.

Expanded Troubled Families programme update

The Government announced in the Budget 2014 that it would roll out the expanded programme in April 2015 and confirmed the first year's funding of an anticipated 5 year programme. Funding for the expanded programme has been reduced from £4000 per family in Phase 1 to £1800 per family in the expanded programme. Along with the expanded criteria, government have also expanded the number of families they expect us to identify, attach and "turn around", from 465 families in the first 3 year programme to 1580 families over the 5 year life time of the expanded programme. BwD have confirmed that it will participate in the expanded programme and are pledged to achieving significant and sustained progress with 1580 families over the 5 year period, engaging with 348 families in the first year of the expanded programme and integrating and transforming local public services.

Extension of DCLG funding for Talk English project

Extension funding for the DCLG funded Talk English was confirmed last month. The project, due to complete in June this year, has proven so successful that DCLG have allocated further funding of over £20,000 to extend its work until March 2016. The consortium project, led by Manchester City Council, will reach an extra 4,500 people in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Lancashire through its share of the national funding. The project offers informal conversation classes and mentoring schemes with local volunteers, equipping staff in local businesses and services with the skills they need to be able to encourage people with their English.