

# AUDIT AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

30 June 2011

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Head of Fraud Service  
Chief Internal Auditor  
Director of Finance

**TITLE**  
**Corporate Anti Fraud Service  
Annual Fraud Report 2010/11**

**WARDS**  
All

This is the annual report on the progress made in delivering the 2010/11 year service plans; key results of the work undertaken; and the performance achieved.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

To agree the contents of the report.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000**  
**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description of Background Papers</b>	<b>Name/Ext. of Holder of File/Copy</b>	<b>Department/ Location</b>
1.	Corporate Anti Fraud Service operational investigation files and performance reports	Kirsten Quinn	Corporate Anti Fraud Service, 4th Floor, Town Hall, Hammersmith



Hammersmith & Fulham Council

Corporate Anti Fraud Service

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# **Fraud Report**

**The Council's Annual Fraud Report to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011**

## Management Summary

- 1 This report details the counter fraud work undertaken during the year to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2011 by the Council's Corporate Anti Fraud Service (CAFS).
- 2 CAFS has delivered an exceptional performance this year achieving 29 successful prosecutions, 257 sanctions (these include administrative penalties, recovered properties, removals from the council's Housing Register, etc). This total of 286 successful outcomes compares to a target of 180 and a previous year performance of 278. This is the best performance since the inception of this unit in April 2006 and substantially more of these results are from prosecutions (17 in 2009/10 compared to 29 in 2010/11).
- 3 The service identified fraud and error to the value of £14,621,709 including the housing fraud work from the special projects, this figure includes direct cash benefit to the council of £404,500. This compares to CAFS operating costs of £905k and gross costs of £1.1 million.
- 4 The work undertaken by the service has continued to expand with increased referrals for tenancy fraud and internal fraud, plus joint work undertaken with the police supported by a CAFS officer seconded to Hammersmith police station identifying and working on cases in which both the Council have an interest and which serve to reduce crime in the community.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Counter fraud services for the council are provided by the Corporate Anti Fraud Service (CAFS). The CAFS scope includes suspected fraudulent Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims, suspected fraudulent tenancies and circumstances of tenancy related matters, and investigating allegations of fraud or irregularity committed within or against the Council. Further coverage is provided by undertaking special projects, which currently covers tenancy issues.
- 1.2 The CAFS service also has responsibility for raising fraud awareness across the Council, managing participation in the Audit Commission's National Fraud Initiative, providing advice and guidance in such areas as Money Laundering and Whistleblowing, and maintaining close working relationships with the police and other partnership organisations in order to facilitate the effective combating of fraud directed against the Council, whilst contributing to the reduction of crime overall.

## 2. Performance

- 2.1 CAFS performance is measured on outputs which is the number of sanctions successfully applied and the number of fraudulent issues stopped or prevented. We also keep under review the value of fraud and error identified plus the amount of recovered and recoverable losses identified for the Council and the public purse.
- 2.2 The CAFS target for the year was 180 successful outcomes, which has been exceeded significantly with a final outturn of 286. This is easily the best performance of the Service since its creation in 2006 and has improved year on year since its inception. **Figure 2** in Appendix 1 show the breakdown of sanctions achieved.
- 2.3 The number of successful prosecutions achieved this year is substantially improved at 29 delivered against last year's total of 17. In order to manage any delays going forward CAFS has identified and monitored progress on all potential prosecution cases. Copies of some of the press releases for the prosecution cases are provided at **Appendix 2** for information.
- 2.4 It is worth mentioning the volume of referrals received which shows that the service continues to receive more volumes than it can investigate.

CAFS received 1007 referrals comprised of 415 benefit cases, 328 tenancy related cases, 112 internal or corporate cases, a further 152 tenancy project cases, and 7 others. Of these 212 cases were rejected for investigation either because of insufficient quality of information or due to insufficient capacity to proceed. This is summarised in **Figure 1** of Appendix 1.

- 2.5 The measurable financial value of CAFS work involves cash recoveries received from the application of penalties or court awards, Housing Benefit overpayments which become a debt owed to the Council plus a 40% 'bounty' on these overpayments which is paid to the Council via subsidy, the recovery of property or removals from the Housing Register which the Audit Commission have put a value of £75,000 per property, the prevention of fraudulent Right to Buy applications which would attract a discount of £16,000 per property and is valued by the Audit Commission at £26,000, and other overpaid benefits which are recoverable and while bringing no specific value to the Council do represent a saving made to the public purse. The analysis of the value of fraud identified and recovered is contained in the table at **Figure 3** in Appendix 1.
- 2.6 It was the intention to report how much of council debt generated from CAFS work was recovered in the year. Unfortunately system reports only contain details of debts raised and the outstanding amounts at the time the report is produced. While this has previously been calculated as achieving an average of £72k per annum we agreed to only quote actual recoveries going forward and unfortunately while we are certain that at least £120k has been recovered the reports have not been consistent over the year so an accurate year end figure cannot be provided. This is something we will actively pursue for the future as a priority.
- 2.7 Appendix 1 figure 3 shows that the council recovered £404,522 last year and a further £751k is recoverable. There is a further value to the council from properties retained for welfare housing that according to the Audit Commission is worth £13.5 million to the council. These compare well to the cost of the service which was an operational cost of £950k, and a gross cost of £1.1 million.

### **3. Service Review**

- 3.1 The core CAFS service remained temporarily expanded for the year to undertake specialised projects related to tenancy fraud, plus an increase in size of the corporate fraud team reflecting the size of the caseload.
- 3.2 The core CAFS work covers housing benefit, fraudulent tenancies, and corporate fraud. Additional activities include investigating applications on the Housing Register, and a significant amount of fraud and error identified through management of the National Fraud Initiative exercise. The deterrence effect of the publicised work of the Service cannot be ignored, which includes the press releases made for every successful prosecution. Examples of press coverage achieved as a result of these press releases is provided at Appendix 2 for information.
- 3.3 The profile of the Service, the Council, and the fight against fraud in Hammersmith and Fulham has been raised as a result of joint working with the police. One of the CAFS officers has been a dedicated single point of contact between the police and the Council's counter fraud service. The officer spends most of his working time based at Hammersmith police station, working with the police's Payback Unit identifying cases that are of joint interest to the police and the Council, and where there are likely to be identifiable assets which can be seized and confiscation applied for under the Proceeds of Crime Act. The peripheral benefits of this working relationship relate to crime in general.
- 3.4 In order to maximise the realisable benefits from work of this nature, three CAFS officers have trained as accredited Financial Investigation Officers, a further two senior officers have trained as senior authorising officers. We now have the option to apply to the courts to make restraints ourselves, rather than being dependant on the police. The advantage is that currently any assets seized and confiscated and allocated by the court are divided between the Council and the police. If we apply the restraints and bring proceedings ourselves, then we have the opportunity to maximise income to the Council.
- 3.5 Tenancy fraud is being widely recognised as a growing area of concern and the Audit Commission make strong recommendations that Local

Authorities do all in their power to crack down on an estimated 50,000 unlawful tenancies or sublets nationwide. In November 2009 the Minister for Housing announced a national crackdown on tenancy fraud with a series of measures including tenancy data matching. We are reportedly the first Authority nationally to successfully prosecuting a case of Sub-Letting.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 2010-11 have seen the most successful year for counter fraud investigation since the formation of CAFS in 2006 (and indeed prior to that). The level of referral continues to increase due in part to the work of the CAFS team in raising awareness and improving liaison between the Council and its partners, coupled with a long overdue raising of awareness at a national level on tenancy fraud.
- 4.2 Following the reduction in funding at the beginning of the 2010/11 year and a re-structure the unit has now reduced in size. As a result the reliance on temporary staff is reduced and the management structure has been flattened.
- 4.3 The aim of the Corporate Anti Fraud Service going forward is to continually improve the benefit it delivers to the council. With the reduced funding the intention is to focus on achieving better results with the resource available. Options being considered include improving the referral and risk scoring process, making better use of intelligence and increasing our focus on proactive work such as data mining, and by trying to reduce our main operational cost areas such as our legal costs.
- 4.4 The work of local government fraud units will be substantially altered by the proposed national government changes in 2013. CAFS will work together this year to redirect their resources into non benefits related investigations which add value at a more local level. A full pro active programme will be run which will concentrate on areas of risk within the council which are unrelated to the payments of national benefits.

## Appendix 1

**Fig. 1 Cases Opened, Rejected, and Closed 2010-11**

Fraud Area	B/fwd from 2010/11	Referred	Rejected	Closed	C/fwd into 2011/12
Benefit Fraud	389	415	201	239	364
Tenancy Fraud	172	328	11	185	304
Housing Register Project	161	146	-	265	42
Other Housing Fraud	47	-	-	47	0
PSL/HAL Tenancy Project	252	6	0	258	0
Internal or Corporate Project	120	112	-	140	92

**Fig. 2 Performance by Outcome Achieved**

	Prosecutions Successfully Undertaken	Caution, Penalty, Recovery or Disciplinary Sanction	Positive Outcome / Action Achieved	Totals
Housing Benefit	29	50	24	103
Tenancy	01	53	0	54
Tenancy projects	0	92	0	92
Corporate	01	34	02	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>286</b>

**Performance Outturn against Target**

	Annual Outturn
	<b>Total</b>
<i>Target 2010/11</i>	<b>180</b>
<b>Total outturn</b>	286
<i>Target 2009/10</i>	<b>150</b>
<i>Total 2009/10</i>	<b>278</b>
Total 2008/09	186
Total 2007/08	130
Total 2006/07	132
Total 2005/06	96



**Fig.3 Financial Value of Counter Fraud Work Undertaken 2010-11**

		Recovered		Recoverable		Additional value to public purse	Speculative Income
		Recovered by CAFS	Recovered to LBHF via subsidy	Recoverable by CAFS	Recoverable by LBHF	Value of properties recovered or lets avoided	Value of Assets Currently Restrained
<b>Benefits</b>	Penalties (31)	£39,625					
	Costs, Compensation, POCA	£22,574				£3,628.07	
	HB Overpayments				£726,819		
	40% Bounty on HB O/Ps		£290,728				
	Fraud Training	£600					
<b>Tenancy</b>	Tenancies recovered (48)					£3,600,000	
	Housing Register removals (90)					£6,750,000	
	HR Removals2009/10**					£2475,000	
	Right to buys					£52,000	
	Housing other (8)					£407,000	
<b>Corporate</b>	Corporate cases	£41,277				£82,555	
<b>NFI*</b>	HB Overpayments				£24,296	95,889	
	40% Bounty on HB O/Ps		£9,718				
	Pay & pensions						
	Creditors						
Assets Restrained: Benefits cases							950,375
Assets Restrained: Corporate cases							0
<b>Total</b>		<b>£104,076</b>	<b>300,446</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>751,115</b>	<b>13,466,072</b>	<b>930,375</b>
<b>Total recovered</b>		<b>404522</b>					
<b>Total balance recoverable</b>				<b>751,115</b>			
<b>Total overall recoverable value to the council</b>		<b>1,155,637</b>					
<b>Total value to council due to CAFS work</b>		<b>14,621,709</b>					

\*NFI is a bi-annual exercise. Results for the last exercise were published as part of the 2009-10 Annual Fraud Report. No results expected in this area until Q4 at the earliest.

\*\*33 Housing Register removals effected in March 2010 but not counted or reported in 2009/10 outturns, hence included here

CAFS PRESS CUTTINGS – 2010/11


May

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## Benefit fraudster foiled

Friday May 21, 2010

A woman who deceived the council out of more than £18,500 of benefits has avoided jail by the skin of her teeth.

Elizabeth Abisuga, of Bloemfontein Avenue, Shepherds Bush, failed to tell the council that she worked at St Bernard's Hospital, Southall.

Investigations by the council's corporate anti-fraud team also revealed that Abisuga was using two alternative National Insurance numbers to that used for her benefit claims. This meant that it was especially difficult for her fraud to be detected.

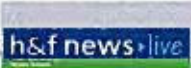

The 42 year-old admitted during interview that she had failed to declare that she worked and that she was using a bank account that the council had not been made aware of.

In total, the mother of two swindled the council out of £15,996 of housing benefit and £2,593 of council tax benefit. She also defrauded the Department of Work and Pensions out of £23,729 of income support.




Abisuga was sentenced to six months imprisonment, suspended for two years, at Isleworth Crown Court on Friday, May 7. She would have served with a custodial sentence had it not been for her two children. She will also have to pay back the money that she was not entitled to. Abisuga served a three year jail term in 1992 for conspiracy to defraud.

Cllr Greg Smith, Cabinet Member for crime and street scene, said "Benefit fraud will not be tolerated in Hammersmith & Fulham and we will continue to bring those who cheat the system to justice. The council carefully scrutinises how every penny of tax-payers money is spent and will continue to clamp down hard on those who think that fraud is acceptable."

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### Benefit fraudster escapes jail

Jul 30 2010 By Greg Burns

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AN 'IDIOTIC' benefit fraudster has avoided jail after conning Hammersmith & Fulham council out of thousands of pounds.

Nazar Hussein, 36, of Hammersmith Road, was given a six-month suspended sentence and

ordered to carry out 40 hours unpaid work at Isleworth Crown Court on July 14.

Hussein lied to the council about his work and also failed to declare a number of bank accounts under his name.

Investigations by the council's corporate anti-fraud team found that up to £300 in cash was being paid into these accounts by Hussein each week.

When challenged by officers he said other people were paying in the money but this was exposed as untrue.

As a result he illegally obtained £17,734 in housing benefit and £1,201 council tax benefit which the court also ordered him to pay back.

Councillor Greg Smith, H&F council cabinet member for residents' services, said: "When will these idiots learn that if you commit a benefit fraud offence in Hammersmith & Fulham you will be caught and you will be punished?"

"Every penny counts as the council works to cut its historic debt of £133m and we will not let fraudsters help themselves to taxpayers cash."

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**Housing fraudster foiled**

Tuesday August 10, 2010

A man who lied in order to get a place on the housing waiting list has been fined almost £2,000.

When filling in his housing register application form, Hassama Ahmed, 25, of Wolfe House, White City Estate, failed to tell council officers that he was the joint owner of the property.

Ahmed's bid was successful but investigations by the council's corporate anti fraud service quickly revealed his lies.

The conman pleaded guilty to fraud and at West London Magistrates on Tuesday July 20 was fined £315 with costs of £1,560.

A council spokesman said: "This kind of behaviour will not be tolerated in Hammersmith & Fulham. There are thousands of people waiting patiently on the housing waiting list and we will not people lying in order to jump to the front of the queue is unacceptable."

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### Classroom helper cheats council out of thousands

Wednesday September 29, 2010

A teaching assistant who stole £30,000 in benefits to pay off his debts has been given a 12-month suspended sentence and 100 hours of community service.

Rodney Brathwaite, 41, of Colne Court, Emlyn Gardens in Shepherd's Bush pleaded guilty at Isleworth Crown Court to defrauding Hammersmith & Fulham Council out of more than £13,400 in housing benefit and council tax benefits of £2,700, and almost £20,000 in income support from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Brathwaite had been receiving benefits from the council from May 2005 to December 2008 after claiming that he was unemployed, a single parent and that the only money he received was income support.

But he failed to inform either the council or the DWP of a change in his circumstances when he started working.

An investigation led by H&F Council found that Brathwaite had actually been working with John Cullen Lighting, which has a showroom in Kings Road, Fulham from November 2005 to November 2006. And just a fortnight later, he began his job as a teacher's assistant job at a Kensington & Chelsea school – where he was still employed when H&F caught him out.

At first Brathwaite said that he had only been a voluntary helper at the school and then, in an interview with the council's fraud squad, that he had only been paid for six hours' work. But he eventually changed his story and admitted that fraud, saying he had not told the council or the DWP of the change in his circumstances because he was in financial difficulties and needed the money.

Brathwaite however denied ever having worked for John Cullen Lighting, despite the council presenting him with evidence from the company to show he worked there. A copy of his job application form for the post of teacher's assistant, which Brathwaite had himself completed, stated that the lighting and design company was his current employer at that time.

Cllr Greg Smith, cabinet member for residents' services, said: "Brathwaite should have been setting an example to the children in his class, who looked up to him, but instead he has let them down by being a liar and a cheat. He says he needed the money but decent law-abiding people simply do not steal £30,000 no matter what dire straits they might find themselves in.

"Brathwaite told tales out of school and I hope he has learnt his lesson – if he steps out of line again, it will mean detention."

Brathwaite pleaded guilty to four counts of dishonestly failing to notify a change of circumstances to LBHF and the DWP – two each – under the Social Security Administration Act.

Sentencing Brathwaite on August 27, Judge Andrew McDowell said he had spared him from paying costs as 'an act of mercy for a man who owes so much already' and warned him that should he breach the terms of the suspended sentence, the factors that assisted [him] today will not do so in the future'.

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October

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## Willesden & Brent Times24

### Suspended prison sentence for benefit cheat

Lorraine King, Sub-Editor

Friday, October 15, 2010

2:22 PM

Greedy 36-year-old tried to hide her £26,000 nest egg

A GREEDY benefit cheat who withdrew £26,000 out of her bank account when she discovered she was being investigated has received a suspended prison sentence.

Collette Anazodo, of Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush, hastily took out the cash when she realised Hammersmith and Fulham Council were probing her entitlement to Housing and Council Tax benefit.

The 36-year-old had not only been claiming benefits while working but she also tried to hide thousands of pounds she had saved in three separate bank accounts.

When she was invited to attend an interview under caution by the council's fraudbusters she failed to turn up, withdrew the money out of her account and subsequently snubbed a further five invitations.

When she was eventually collared in October last year, she claimed she was entitled to the benefit because she was ill thus did not have to declare her job.

She also pleaded ignorance about declaring her nest eggs.

She eventually admitted fleecing the council out of £17,766 in Housing Benefit and £4,130 of Council Tax Benefit.

She also swindled £37,000 of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Anazodo was convicted of benefit fraud and money laundering, due to her withdrawing the large sum, and was sentenced to two years in jail suspended for ten months.

Cllr Greg Smith, cabinet member for residents' services, said: "It beggars belief that people think they can commit benefit fraud and get away with it.

"This council will work tirelessly to catch those who think it is acceptable to con the benefits system.

"Every penny counts as the council works to cut its historic debt of £133 million and we will not let fraudsters help themselves to hard working taxpayers' money."

# CAFS PRESS CUTTINGS – 2010/11

October continued: CAFS coverage in the United States of America.

The screenshot shows the USA TODAY website interface. At the top is a red navigation bar with the USA TODAY logo and 'Topics' menu. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with categories like Home, News, Travel, Money, Sports, Life, Tech, and Weather. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: Topics > Organizations > Sports Leagues > International Soccer > Fulham >. The article title is 'Shepherd's Bush benefits cheat spared jail'. The text below the title states: 'A BENEFITS cheat has avoided jail after conning the council out of thousands of pounds. Collette Anazodo, 36, of Uxbridge Road, Shepherd's Bush, pleaded guilty to fraud and money laundering at Isleworth Crown Court on September 27 and was handed a two-year suspended sentence.' To the right of the article is a sidebar with a 'Get alerts about Fulham' section, 'Topics related to Fulham', and 'Other topics' including a list of 'Topics in the news' and 'Browse Categories'. At the bottom of the page is a footer with 'USA TODAY Digital Services' and various links for mobile, newsletters, RSS, and social media. The footer also includes the copyright notice '© 2011 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.' and the logo 'A GANNETT COMPANY'.

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**Shepherd's Bush benefits cheat spared jail**

A BENEFITS cheat has avoided jail after conning the council out of thousands of pounds. Collette Anazodo, 36, of Uxbridge Road, Shepherd's Bush, pleaded guilty to fraud and money laundering at Isleworth Crown Court on September 27 and was handed a two-year suspended sentence.

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October continued:

## Titled widow helped swindle £90,000 of taxpayers' cash in housing benefit fraud

By DAILY MAIL REPORTER  
 Last updated at 6:57 PM on 30th October 2010

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A titled widow who helped to swindle £90,000 of taxpayers' cash in benefits was jailed for 12 weeks today.

Lady Oriol Bowden, 70, was convicted of accepting housing benefits as a landlady which she was not entitled to.

Her partner, Graham Young, was jailed for 12 months after he claimed to be Lady Bowden's lodger at the Putney home so he could draw ten of thousands of pounds in benefits from Hammersmith and Fulham Council as well as Council Tax benefit and pension credits.

However, he failed to notify the authorities when his relationship with Lady Bowden began in 2004 and that his living arrangements had changed.

Young was claiming to be a single man living at one address when in fact he had a common law spouse, Lady Bowden, and was spending most of his time living with her as man and wife.

Had Young informed the council of his change in circumstances Lady Bowden would have been means tested and he would have had his benefit hand-outs slashed, the court heard.

The court also heard that even though Lady Bowden was supposed to be his landlady the pair regularly stayed at two other properties - one in Berkshire and one in Ramsgate, Kent, owned by her, along with a gallery also in Ramsgate.

Both the house and gallery in Ramsgate had been bought in both their names, but were later transferred to Lady Bowden's sole ownership.

However, one of the properties was willed to Young because Lady Bowden didn't want him to have nothing when she died.

More...

Benefit cheat who lied her way to £53,000 claiming she lived alone is caught out by husband's tyre marks in the snow

Police were alerted to a strange incident involving Lady Bowden's BMW showed the pair were listed as common law spouses on their joint insurance policy.

They were then found to living together in Winkfield, Berkshire, and arrested in 2006.

The couple denied being in a relationship and insisted they were just close friends with a 'unique and special bond' and never had a sexual relationship. However Lady Bowden's police statement referred to Young as her boyfriend.

David Levin, prosecuting, also said the couple often shared a bed and stayed in the same hotel room, but they claimed it was too big and they didn't have space.



Jailed: Lady Oriol Bowden was sentenced to 12 weeks in prison after being found guilty of benefit fraud

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### FEMALE TODAY

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 Duchess of Cambridge's £175 dress caused such a frenzy the retailer's website crashed



HLIZ JOHNS: Kate looked every inch the modern and fashionable style icon  
 And Sam Cam beat Michelle by an anatomic nose



TV's worn fake eyelashes every day for the past 13 years  
 TOWIE's Chloe Sims braves the make-up free look  
 Should try it more often



She may look like the perfect pop princess... but Cheryl Cole suffers from the curse of the cankles (that's when your calf and ankle become one)



Natalie Cassidy's fiancé Adam Cottrell arrested and charged over assault on actress  
 He was quizzed by police after argument at the home



Anything for my best friend: David Beckham turns out for Manchester Utd in Gary Neville's testimonial  
 He flew in specially from LA




Ryan Giggs shows the strain as injunction scandal refuses to go away... and his wife appears WITHOUT her wedding ring



October continued:

Chronicle



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
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## Local News

### Crackdown on benefit fraudsters continues

Oct 26 2010 By Greg Smith

Add a comment
Report



A PENSIONER was handed a suspended prison sentence for benefits fraud seven months after her husband was convicted of the same offence.

Elizabeth Kamara, 65, of Willow Vale, Hammersmith, saw her four month jail sentence suspended for a year at Blackfriars Court on October 15.

She had pleaded guilty to falsely claiming £22,635 of housing benefit and £8,819 of council tax benefit with her husband Ibrahim, who was given a nine-month suspended sentence in March.

The pair were investigated after Hammersmith & Fulham Council's anti-fraud team gained intelligence that Mrs Kamara had savings in a bank account and was working as a full-time care assistant.

They found that, between 2002 and 2004, the couple completed five benefit application forms which they both signed.

H&F Council's battle against benefit fraudsters will see another woman sentenced next month for swindling the council out of £8,300 in housing benefit.

Kirsty McCluskey, 40, of Moylan Road, Hammersmith, was found guilty at Isleworth Crown Court on October 15.







McCluskey claimed £4,000 in housing benefits for a home she was not even living in and then a further £2,450 she was not entitled to for failing to declare she had another income and she will be return to the court to be sentenced on November 12.

Councillor Greg Smith, H&F cabinet member for residents' services, said: "This council will not tolerate this kind of dishonest behaviour.

"A welfare cheat is no different from someone who comes up and robs you in the street.

"Every penny counts as the council works to cut its historic debt of £133 million and we will not let fraudsters help themselves to hard working taxpayers' money."

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November

Thursday, November 18, 2010 **Sun** 49

# BENEFIT COCAINE BARONS

## Couple's luxury life

By ANTHONY FRANCE

**A COUPLE ran a multi-million-pound drug empire while on housing benefit.**

Michael Lawrence, 42, and Tracy Lucas, 44, went on luxury holidays in Florida and Mexico while raking in £80,000 of taxpayers' cash.

Their gang, who flooded London with cocaine and cannabis for ten years, were caught after undercover cops mounted an 18-month operation.

Lawrence and Lucas sometimes spent £4,000 a night on champagne, owned a £385,000 house in Chessington, Surrey, and had £500,000 in the bank.

But they defrauded Hammersmith and Fulham Council out of £80,358 from 2005.

Lawrence was jailed for 8½ years after admitting drug and fraud charges. Lucas got seven months for benefit fraud. Lawrence's brother James, 44, got ten months



Caught... couple in Mexico

suspended, and sister Sandra, 45, got a community sentence for helping launder money.

Two friends were jailed for helping the couple supply the drugs.

*afrance@the-sun.co.uk*

November continued

4 12 November 2010

## NEWS

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### News in brief

#### Con artist caught

**WEST KENSINGTON:** A fraudster who claimed benefit pretending to be a lone parent has narrowly escaped a jail sentence.


Jetmira Barjami, 29, of Ivatt Place, West Kensington, claimed state benefits as a single mother with two children and was also collecting income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

However, following an anonymous tip-off, Hammersmith and Fulham Council's corporate anti-fraud service (CAFS), found that Barjami was living with her partner, an employee of Jobcentre Plus.

Barjami admitted defrauding the council out of £10,762 of housing benefit and £1,975.38 of council tax benefit. She was given a three-month sentence suspended for 12 months at Isleworth Crown Court on November 5.



January



Chronicle

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## White City benefits cheat took a six-week Dubai holiday with stolen profits

By Greg Burns  
Feb 13 2011

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A BENEFITS cheat narrowly avoided jail after taking her six children on a lengthy holiday to Dubai with £10,000 she stole from the public purse over eight years.

Anab Gas, of White City Estate, Shepherd's Bush, pleaded guilty to two counts of benefit fraud at West London Magistrates Court last Tuesday (15/2).

The 39-year-old was handed a three-month suspended prison sentence meaning she will be jailed if she commits a similar offence in the next 12 months.

Gas admitted swindling Hammersmith and Fulham Council out of £8,000 of housing benefit and £1,383 in council tax benefits.

Council officers began investigating in 2008 after the Department for Work and Pensions highlighted a £30,700 overpayment she received, but never declared, after her father died.

When interviewed, Gas told the council's planned corporate anti-fraud team that she knew she should have declared the cash but blamed stress for her refusal to do so amid arguments with her step-mother about the money.

She also admitted spending the money on a six-week jolly to Dubai, a Vauxhall Corsa and furniture for her home.

Councillor Greg Smith, cabinet member for residents services, said: "Gas' deceit is enough to make people's blood boil.

"She thought she could get away with putting her hands in the council's coffers but I am delighted that her plans blew up in her face.

"The council has to save £54m over the next three years and will not let rogues like Gas undermine our efforts."

What do you make of the sentence? Is it too lenient? Email [gregburns@trinity.outh.ouk](mailto:gregburns@trinity.outh.ouk) with your views.

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