

HOUSING

Fire-risk landlord fined £30,000

A landlord of three houses in multiple occupation in Watford has been successfully prosecuted for a range of offences that placed the lives of his tenants at risks.

Following a fire at 16 Woodford Road in May, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service reported landlord Alex De Gabriele to the council's environmental health section. Council officers executed a warrant and visited numbers 16, 16A and 18. They found that all five rooms in number 16A and five rooms in number 18 were occupied. None of the properties was licensed under the Housing Act 2004.

The officers also found contraventions in all three properties of the regulations relating to the management of houses in multiple occupation. These included a silenced fire detection system, fire door self-closers not closing fully, landing lights not working, a fridge/freezer and mattress on a landing causing an obstruction and ill-fitting fire doors.

Mr De Gabriele pleaded guilty to eight offences under the Housing Act 2004. Watford magistrates took into account the serious risk of death or injury from faulty fire precautions. They also acknowledged that the lack of action by the owner was prompted by financial motives, despite the properties producing an annual income of over £72,000.

Mr De Gabriele received fines and costs of £30,202 and a victim surcharge. The court accepted that he had co-operated with the investigation, had no previous convictions and pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity, which limited the levels of the fines.

Keith Crout, portfolio holder responsible for environmental health at Watford BC, commented: 'The risks of death or injury from a fire are higher in a HMO than a single family house. This is why councils are required to license them. It is vital that landlords operate them safely, for the welfare of their tenants.'

'We have many excellent landlords in Watford but we will continue to tackle those people who make money from rent at the expense of tenants' safety.'