

News Release

Issued on: Thursday 1 November 2018

Property Managing Agent is Sentenced for Fire Safety Breaches

A property managing agent from Leicester, appeared in Leicester Crown Court, on Wednesday 31 October, following a guilty plea entered at a previous hearing at Leicester Magistrates Court.

The managing agent pleaded guilty to 11 breaches of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. The charges related to a number of fire safety breaches raised by Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service. The agent, who acted as the 'responsible person' for the property, managed eight dwellings (residential flats) within a property on Pocklingtons Walk, Leicester. The top floor and basement level were being let to students and families.

Issues in relation to fire safety first came to the attention of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service in April 2015. Since this date, a number of inspections and audits have been carried out and they highlighted significant deficiencies in fire safety measures and breaches of the duties required of those responsible for the premises under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

On 27 December 2016, a fire occurred at the property in Pocklingtons Walk, in the vicinity of a cupboard in the communal parts of the building. The fire alarms failed to sound and escape routes and emergency exits were compromised, resulting in the occupants of the flats upstairs fleeing from their homes and escaping via the roof of the neighbouring Magistrates Court building. Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus were deployed to carry out the rescue of eight students from the roof, and other tenants had to be led to safety from within the basement.

A second fire also occurred on 16 December 2017, in the upstairs meter cupboard. The cupboard was not fitted with appropriate fire resistant materials and escape routes became filled with smoke, which led to three tenants having to escape by climbing out of an upstairs window. Power was also subsequently shut off, meaning there was no emergency lighting and

no mains power to the fire alarm, but tenants were permitted to remain in the property by the landlord.

There was a clear public interest in bringing this case to court. The responsible person, Vinod Singla, had been warned on numerous occasions by Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, but did not take notice of the warnings or take appropriate measures to comply with fire safety regulations. A number of breaches were found at the premises, and the breaches persisted for a significant period of time due to a lack of action by the responsible person of some considerable experience.

Vinod Singla was sentenced by Judge Head to:

- A eight month prison sentence suspended for two years
- 240 hours of Community Service
- A ten week Curfew Order.

In sentencing Vinod Singla, Judge Head referred to the property as “a death trap”.

He described Vinod Singla as “wholly inadequate and unsuitable” as a managing agent.

Andy Daybell, Station Manager, Fire Protection, said: “The consequences to the occupants could have been devastating either because they did not have significant warning of a fire, or if they did they would be unable to escape. This is certainly a case were a landlord put profit before the safety of his residents.

“As this case strongly illustrates, complying with fire safety legislation is not optional and courts take failures of Fire Safety seriously. Failure to ensure suitable fire safety arrangements can put people’s lives at risk, particularly in premises where they sleep and are therefore potentially even more vulnerable to fire.

“I hope that this case shows that those people who have responsibilities to meet fire safety obligations, but fail to do so, face severe penalties.

“Where landlords fail in their duties to uphold Fire Safety legislation and as in this case we find they are blatantly ignoring them, we will not hesitate to prosecute.

“The outcome of this case has been achieved through the hard work, dedication and professionalism, over the last three and a half years, by over 15 employees of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service.”

For further information, visit Leicestershire-fire.gov.uk.

ENDS

Notes to editors: Station Manager Andy Daybell can be made available for comment if requested.

About the Service

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency response, prevention and protection services from 20 stations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Its headquarters is based in Birstall, Leicester.

The Service's prevention, education, enforcement and inspection programmes have resulted in significant reductions in the number of incidents. In the last ten years, fire-related incidents have reduced by 43 percent.

During 2016/17, the Service attended 694 road traffic collisions, of which 148 were extrications from vehicles, in addition to 2,259 fires. 272 schools were visited as part of the Service's schools programme, delivering fire and road safety education to pupils. Staff organised or took part in 1,613 community safety events, promoting fire and road safety and arson prevention, and 145 Virtual Fatal Four (VF4) events as part of the Service's young drivers' road safety project.

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