new charter
HOUSING TRUST GROUP

PRESS RELEASE

18th February 2004

No show, no home

The Courts' patience with an unruly Ashton woman ran out yesterday (Tuesday 17th February) when a judge ended her tenancy in her absence. Persistent threatening behaviour towards elderly neighbours by Laura Hetherington resulted in a suspended prison sentence as well as losing her home.

Oldham County Court heard Hetherington of Hope Street in Ashton-under-Lyne moved into her flat thirteen months ago, but had terrorised pensioners living nearby with her lifestyle. Loud parties, drunken visitors and aggressive and insulting behaviour towards neighbours put her on a collision course with New Charter's Tenancy Compliance specialists.

On November 27th 2003, District Judge Gaunt made an Interim Order restraining her behaviour. Yesterday's hearing was threefold: a committal hearing (following breaches of an Interim Order banning nuisance, annoyance and harassment to people living nearby), an application for an injunction and an application for possession of the home.

Speaking after the hearing, a resident who did not wish to be named said, ”She had a complete and utter disregard for those who lived nearby. The flat became an underage drinking den, sometimes with over twenty kids inside. Condoms were strewn outside and windows regularly smashed. She would also leave her own door open, so all sorts would turn up and use the flat as a doss-house. The older folk around here were frightened to answer the door or leave their home.”

“We turned to New Charter for help, but they’ve been dogged by repeated adjournments at Court – until today. We’re all relieved and glad she’s got her marching orders.”

Hetherington was given two jail terms of 14 days, suspended for a year for her contempt in breaching the Interim Order. Mr Recorder Freeman granted an injunction banning her from causing trouble in the neighbourhood and granted New Charter possession of her flat. She was ordered to pay costs of over £6000.

After the verdict, Steve Hodson, Head of Neighbourhood said "We and the vast majority of our residents heave a collective sign of relief. At times, it’s felt like the Court process couldn’t resolve anti-social behaviour issues quickly enough. We took this up direct with Home Office Minister Hazel Blears last week. But today shows our determination to deal firmly with bad behaviour. The message to those who make others' lives a misery is –
it will be you next."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage nearly 16,400 properties transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £49million a year and a workforce of almost 800, New Charter is one of the twenty largest Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), and is regulated by The Housing Corporation, a Government watchdog.

2. Laura Hetherington (dob 26.01.83), 41 Hope Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, the Defendant was a New Charter tenant with a twelve-month introductory ('probationary') tenancy. New Charter served notice to end the tenancy on 11th January 2004 because of anti-social behaviour.

3. Group Chief Executive Ian Munro appeared on BBC's NorthWest Tonight programme on 11th February where he expressed frustration with the lack of decisive action by Courts in antisocial behaviour cases direct to Home Office Minister Hazel Blears.

4. The judgement on 17th February was:
   a) the Defendant is ordered to not cause nuisance, harassment or annoyance in the vicinity of Hope Street, Ashton-under-Lyne for a period of twelve months.
   b) for breaches of the Interim Order on 28th and 29th November, the Defendant is committed to prison for 14 days.
   c) for breaches of the Interim Order on 5th and 6th December, the Defendant is committed to prison for 14 days.
   d) the two committal orders are to run concurrently and are suspended for 12 months on the basis that the Defendant complies with the terms of the injunction (a, above).
   e) the Defendant is ordered to provide vacant possession of the property, 41 Hope Street, Ashton by 2nd March 2004.
   f) the Defendant is ordered to pay the Claimant's costs, assessed at £6316.50.

5. Hetherington is now automatically a 'Non-Qualifying Person' as we successfully ended the tenancy because of her bad behaviour. New Charter will not therefore rehouse her.

6. This action is also a success for the Tameside Strategic Partnership, a board made up of near 30 members from local business, the voluntary and community sector and key public bodies. Through consultation with local people, it creates and then implements the Tameside Community Strategy – a three-year plan to improve the quality of life for local people. It was set up in 2000 and meets three times a year. It ensures actions are taken within six key areas, including: *A safe environment – cutting crime and disorder*.

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