

PRESS RELEASE

Immediate release

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Witnesses still protected at New Charter



Photograph of Danny McLoughlin available

New Charter has made clear its determination to protect the identity of some witnesses following the Law Lords' recent ruling on anonymity.

The House of Lords ruling quashed a murder conviction last week and the judgement is binding on criminal cases brought before the Courts. Justice Minister Jack Straw has vowed to change the law through Parliament.

The case has triggered concern as many anti-social behaviour orders have been made which used anonymous and hearsay testimony.

New Charter is one of the leading practitioners in tackling anti-social behaviour. Successful past actions involved using professional witnesses and staff trained in presenting hearsay evidence to protect witnesses who fear reprisals.

New Charter's Director of Legal Services Danny McLoughlin said: "The Law Lords ruling means Ministers are promising urgent legislation to allow witnesses in criminal trials to give evidence anonymously. Many of our actions are civil actions and it appears the precedent is not applicable.

"Often, our witnesses are prepared to speak out and give evidence, and judges find their testimonies compelling. But we can assure current and future witnesses who genuinely fear reprisals that we will continue to protect their identities."

New Charter uses professional witness services to collect evidence against the worst offenders and several of its staff are used to presenting hearsay evidence on behalf of frightened residents.



business for neighbourhoods

A few cases have used the criminal courts where the nature of anti-social activity has been so serious. New Charter does not believe any local convictions will be overturned.

"We work closely with Greater Manchester Police in many areas" continued McLoughlin, "and will review any upcoming case which we think may be affected. But with urgent legislation promised, witnesses should be reassured we will continue to protect identities."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Charter formed in 1999 as the new landlords to own and manage homes transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester. With a turnover of £57million a year and a workforce of almost 800, New Charter is one of the region's largest Registered Social Landlords, and is regulated by The Housing Corporation, a Government watchdog. By incorporating Aksa Housing Association, the Group owns 15,000 homes.
2. In 2007-08, New Charter obtained 13 Anti-Social Behaviour Injunctions and 2 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, with a further 17 households losing their homes because of bad behaviour. More than 100 cases were dealt with using non-legal sanctions such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.
3. **iN business for neighbourhoods** is a long-term project highlighting housing associations' performance. As social businesses, housing associations do not make profit. They offer homes for rent and sale at prices local people can afford. Housing associations provide more than homes - they help create places where people want to live. Wherever you see the **iN business for neighbourhoods** sign, something great is happening in the area. Housing Associations who display this logo are committed to their customers, the neighbourhoods they work in and strive for excellence in everything they do.

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