

July 13th, 2011

Benefit cheat given suspended sentence

A benefit cheat from Sharnford narrowly avoids jail for falsely claiming more than £35,000 in benefit hand-outs.

Andrew Topliff, of Brookfield, Sharnford, pleaded guilty to the charges at Hinckley Magistrates on June 16, each charge related to his failure to tell the authorities that his partner [who was in full time work] had moved in with him. Andrew later married his partner at The Hinckley Island Hotel in March 2006. Between December 2005 and July 2009, he dishonestly received £19,465.42 Housing and Council Tax Benefit as well as £16,186.62 Income Support.

The 35-year-old was given a 16-week prison sentence, suspended for 12 months, for 2 counts of benefit fraud at Leicester Magistrates Court on 8th July 2011.

Mr Topliff said he was ashamed of his actions and had made arrangements to repay the overpaid benefits at £300pcm.

The magistrates told Topliff that his actions had been dishonest and the matter was so serious that sentencing guidelines meant only a 20 week prison sentence would be sufficient penalty. However, due to the fact that he had admitted his offending at the earliest opportunity and was repaying the sums he had falsely claimed, his sentence was reduced and suspended for 12 months. A 12 month supervision order was also given.

This case was identified by the Audit Commissions' National Fraud Initiative bi-annual data-matching exercise and jointly prosecuted by Blaby District Council and the Department of Work and Pensions.

Councillor John Hudson, portfolio holder for finance and efficiency said: “We work closely with the DWP, and other government bodies, to share information about those suspected of fraud and to gather evidence for prosecutions so the chance of getting away with making false claims reduces all the time. I would encourage anyone who is claiming benefit and has a change of circumstances to declare this at the earliest opportunity.”

The public can report benefit fraud at www.blaby.gov.uk/fraud or by calling the Council's confidential hotline on 0116 272 7733. All calls are confidential; callers can remain anonymous if they wish.