

Housing cheat forced to hand back her keys

► Council probe finds that woman blocked a home for those in need
► Fraud team made a triple swoop on houses

JAMES WATSON

A TENANT who ripped off the taxpayer while secretly owning more than half a million pounds worth of property has been thrown out of her socially rented home.

Gwen Asombang, who also went under the name of Gwen Boyd, has held a tenancy at a Crown Housing property in Auriol Road, Fulham, since the 1990s.

But a H&F Council investigation, with help from Crown Housing, found she failed to admit she owned a £190,000 home in Nightingale Road, Ealing, in 2002. Just months after being granted a fresh tenancy in the two-bedroom flat in Auriol Road she bought a second property, a £330,000 home in Leighton Road, Ealing.

If she had admitted owning either property she would not have been eligible for a place on the housing register.

Asombang raked in thousands while depriving a needy family of a home at an affordable rent, banking £1,200 every month letting out her Nightingale Road property alone.

H&F Cabinet member Lucy Ivimy said: "We will not tolerate people profiting from some of the most vulnerable members of society by unlawfully subletting their home. The message is clear – if you are illegally subletting your home we will find you and take it back, and you may face criminal charges."

Asombang was a victim of her own greed after she pleaded with her housing association to move her to a bigger home.

When H&F Council's fraud investigators visited all three properties simultaneously in June they found the tenants in one of Asombang's Ealing properties had a tenancy agreement stating she lived at her other Ealing

house. When she was confronted she angrily refused to sign a statement about her circumstances and ripped it up, ordering officers to leave once they revealed evidence of her links to two other homes.

Checks revealed Asombang was eligible for council tax on both properties and the Land Registry revealed they were held in the name of Gwen Boyd.

She was finally forced to give up her tenancy after a series of court hearings at Central London Court.

In September this year, just days before a court hearing, Asombang relented and told Crown Housing she would give the keys back.

This is the latest home to be seized back from housing cheats after the council launched a zero-tolerance blitz on unlawful subletters earlier this year, recovering millions of pounds worth of property.

► *To pass on information about an unlawful subletter call the council corporate anti-fraud service on 020 8753 1273 or email housing.investigations@lbhf.gov.uk*

Fraudster claimed more than £20k

A WOMAN who defrauded the council out of more than £20,000 hid money in undeclared bank accounts.

Collette Anazodo, 36, of Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush, claimed housing and council tax benefit but failed to declare three accounts with savings in excess of £16,000 – the limit for housing benefit – and hid wages paid in from undeclared work.

She hastily withdrew £26,000 from one of the these when she found out the council's corporate anti-fraud service was onto her, and was also prosecuted under the Proceeds of Crime Act for this.

She was arrested on suspicion of benefit fraud in October 2009 and claimed she did not know she had to declare the bank accounts or that she was working, because she was ill and therefore entitled to benefit.

In total Anazodo swindled the council out of £17,766 of housing benefit and £4,130 of council tax benefit. She also defrauded the Department for Work and Pensions out of £37,000.

She pleaded guilty to benefit fraud and money laundering at Isleworth Crown Court on Monday, September 27, when she was given a two-year prison sentence suspended for 10 months.

Benefit cheat wife follows her husband in being sentenced

▶ Sixty-eight-year-old convicted just months after husband ▶ Cheat tried to hide undeclared wages and bank accounts

JON WEISGARD

A FRAUDSTER has been sentenced just months after her husband was convicted of similar offences.

Elizabeth Kamara, 68,

of Willow Vale, Shepherds Bush, was sentenced to four months in prison, suspended for 12 months, after admitting swindling £22,635 of housing benefit and £6,819 of council tax benefit.

Her husband Ibrahim was given a nine-month suspended sentence in March for trying to con the council.

The investigation by H&F Council's corporate anti-fraud team was opened following a national datamatch which indicated that Mrs Kamara had savings in a bank account not

declared to the council. During the investigation it was also discovered she was in full-time employment, working as a care assistant.

Between November 2002 and September 2005 the Kamaras completed five benefit application forms, claiming as a couple, both supplying personal information and both signing the claim forms.

After Mr Kamara realised the council had become aware of his wife's undeclared wages and bank account he submitted a benefit application form

claiming as a single person.

He also failed to declare he held two building society accounts with relevant savings.

● In a separate case, a 40-year-old woman has been found guilty of benefit fraud after a trial at Isleworth Crown Court.

Kirsty McCuskey, formerly of Moylan Road, Hammersmith, defrauded the council out of £6,360 of housing benefit.

She claimed almost £4,000 of housing benefit for a property she was not even living at and then a further £2,400 she was not entitled to by failing to

declare she had an alternative source of income.

H&F cabinet member Greg Smith said: "This council will not tolerate this kind of dishonest behaviour.

"A welfare cheat is no different from someone who comes up and robs you in the street.

"Every penny counts as the council works to cut its historic debt of £133million and we will not let fraudsters help themselves to taxpayers' money."

McCuskey will be sentenced at Isleworth Crown Court on November 12.