

Tenancy fraud – who could be missing out on a home?

There are many types of tenancy fraud that can take place in social housing, but what about the victims?

Tenancy fraud can take away someone's chance of a genuinely needed family home.



Here we talk to Rachel about how she was forced to look for a home for over four years due to a property being used fraudulently.

Rachel lived in a two-bedroom flat with her teenage son and daughter who were forced to share a room. She spent lots of time bidding on homes through Devon Home Choice trying to find somewhere bigger for her family.

After four long years, Rachel was offered a home that had just become available following a criminal investigation by Plymouth Community Homes and the Devon Audit Partnership – Rachel's search for a home could have taken weeks instead of years if no fraud had taken place.

The real cost of tenancy fraud is that people who genuinely need housing are missing out on somewhere.

Rachel, how were conditions in your previous home and why did you need to move?

I had been in my last home about five years and we only had the two bedrooms which meant that my 13 year old son and 15 year old daughter had to share a room. They were good about it but when he wanted to play his Xbox on one side of the room and she wanted to play her music on the other side there was a bit of crossfire.

I also have my eldest grandson once a week so it was becoming really quite cramped in there so we needed a bigger home.

How long were you bidding on homes before you were successful?

I think it was about four and a half years – we could have been in a lot sooner if someone wasn't using the home illegally.

You know the home became available after a criminal investigation – you were looking for a home for a long time so how does that make you feel?

It's frustrating because there's so many people in my position – you're taking away a property from someone who needs it. If I knew someone that was doing it I would report it anonymously as it's the right thing to do.

Since you've moved in have you seen an improvement in family life?

Yes majorly – sometimes I feel like I'm living on my own as the kids just keep themselves to themselves in their rooms – they're both a lot happier now that they have their own space. There's a lot less tension, even though it's been a difficult year with Covid-19. My dog is a lot more settled here as well, she used to look out the window and bark all the time but she has really calmed down now.

Rachel managed to find her home although it took a long time, but how many families are out there waiting for a home while people are profiting off tenancy fraud?

Ashley Varley, Chair of the Devon Tenancy Fraud Forum said: “People sometimes think that counter fraud work is all about catching criminals however this is an excellent example of the real success of returning a social housing property to its correct use. There are thousands of families on the Devon Home Choice register that are in genuine need of housing and the prolonged illegal sublet of this property resulted in many years of unnecessary waiting for the tenant. I would urge anyone who is subletting their social housing property to do the right thing and surrender their tenancy”

Tenancy fraud is a national issue and relies on people in the community to report it to their landlord.

You can report it here.

- Subletting is a criminal offence and those found guilty can face a prison sentence and/or a £5,000 fine
- Tenancy Fraud cost the tax payer an estimated £1.8billion in between 2013 – 2016.
*Annual Fraud Indicator 2017
- In the last quarter Plymouth had 5059 households on the DHC register.
- Social Housing fraud, in Plymouth and other areas of Devon, is investigated at a criminal level by Devon Audit Partnership on behalf of the relevant Local Authority.

