

Fraudster has unduly lenient sentence increased

News story

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In February 2020, Michael O'Neill, 28, worked with a group of people to target the victim. The group pretended to be builders and demanded payment for vital works that needed to be carried out on the victim's property. The victim initially paid £2,000, but grew suspicious and refused to pay when he was asked for more money.

The group further deceived the victim, informing him that charges had been brought against the builders and that he could receive compensation if he paid some additional money. The victim gave a cheque for £15,000 to the offender for this. On another occasion the offender accompanied the victim to withdraw a further sum of £75,000, however when this transaction did not clear, the police were called and the offender was arrested at the scene.

O'Neill pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation. On 14 July O'Neill was sentenced to 21 months' imprisonment suspended for 24 months at Inner London Crown Court.

Following a referral to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme by the Solicitor General, on 24 September the Court found the sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 3 years' and 1 month imprisonment.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal, the Solicitor General, Alex Chalk QC MP, said: "This was a sustained and thoroughly dishonest scam designed to manipulate a particularly vulnerable victim. I welcome the Court of Appeal's decision today to increase the sentence. Let it serve as a deterrent to

others thinking of carrying out similarly cruel crimes.”

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