

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024038478276 A fraudster who created a £10m property empire with the help of Tameside's criminal underworld has to pay back more than £3.5m or face more jail time. Scott Rowbotham, 37, amassed a huge portfolio across Greater Manchester totalling 88 properties, with the assistance of criminals including convicted drug dealer Billy Black. Under the Proceeds of Crime Act, Rowbotham has been ordered to pay back £3,522,459 within three months, or face 10 years in jail. The time period can be extended to six months if allowed. That figure is the highest ever awarded by a court following a GMP financial investigation. Rowbotham's property empire will now be sold off to recoup some of his ill-gotten gains. It comes as solicitor Ross McKay, who helped Rowbotham achieve the huge fraud, was jailed for seven years after a jury unanimously found him guilty of three counts of money laundering. Rowbotham, previously of Ashes Close, Stalybridge, was jailed for three years and eight months in May 2017 after admitting fraud and money laundering between 2004 and 2014. He has now been released from prison. Manchester Crown Court has heard that Rowbotham was able to persuade lenders to hand over huge cash sums by lying about his income and forging payslips. He also exaggerated the value of houses he was buying, which cut out the need for deposits and in turn maximised his profits. To fund more deals, Rowbotham let out and remortgaged existing properties, and falsified sales to friends and family to raise more cash. He is said to have enjoyed a luxury lifestyle from the proceeds, despite earning only £1,000 in declared income and paying £18.20 in tax in an eleven-year period. A sentencing hearing on Friday, prosecutor Nick Clarke QC said that McKay was Rowbotham's solicitor, carrying out conveyancing for their properties. Police said McKay, a 39-year-old father-of-three, was their 'go to' lawyer, as he would not ask too many questions about their business or where the money was coming from. Defending, Mark Rhind said that this marks the end of McKay's professional career, as he will be struck off. McKay, originally from Dukinfield, studied law at Huddersfield University and qualified in 2004, the court heard. Judge Timothy Smith said that McKay, of Sagars Road, Handforth, Cheshire, then acted fraudulently for a five year period, eventually being arrested in 2014. Addressing him, the judge said: "You were expected to be a person of utmost integrity and honesty. "You fell far short of those high standards of professionalism, trust and integrity that are to be expected of a solicitor. "You failed, as was your duty, to uphold the law and the proper administration of justice. "By your actions, you enabled criminal property to be acquired on a significant scale, and chose to involve yourself in the activities of those involved in crime, organised crime and, in the case of Mr Black, drug dealing." After today's hearing, senior financial investigator Adrian Ladkin, of GMP's Economic Crime Unit, said: "McKay was fully aware that the purpose of the transactions was to launder criminal proceeds and he was deliberately dishonest in facilitating them. "As a solicitor, McKay was in a position of trust, but he spectacularly failed in his legal duties through his corrupt and unlawful actions. "It is thanks to the meticulous work of the officers in this case that today he has been brought to account for his deceitful actions." Black, now 48, was eventually jailed for 15 years after being found guilty of fraud, drugs and money laundering offences. He later had his sentence increased by seven years to a total of 22 years, after failing to pay off the £999,999 ordered following his Proceeds of Crime Act hearing. Neil Bolton, a solicitor who fraudulently helped Black to build up his property portfolio, was also previously jailed for nine months. The Proceeds of Crime Act, which came into force in 2013, allows police to go after the assets of criminals after they have been convicted. Cash is often reinvested into good causes and community projects across Greater Manchester.