

**FIRST-TIER TRIBUNAL**

**PROPERTY CHAMBER**

**(RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY)**

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| **Case reference** | **:** | **LON/00AP/HMF/2025/0805** |
| **Property** | **:** | **124 Russell Avenue, London, N22 6PS** |
| **Applicants** | **:** | **(1) JOSEPH GRIFFIN**<br>**(2) TAYLOR DE VOS**<br>**(3) GEORGE SMILLIE** |
| **Respondent** | **:** | **SHING LEUNG CHOW** |
| **Type of application** | **:** | **Application for a rent repayment order by tenant**<br>**Sections 40, 41, 43, & 44 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016** |
| **Tribunal** | **:** | **Judge Shepherd**<br>**Richard Waterhouse FRICS** |
| **Date of Decision** | **:** | **8th October 2026** |

**DECISION**

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1. A rent repayment order of **£16162.90** is to be paid to the Applicants by the Respondent. The said sum must be paid within 28 days of this decision being issued. The Respondent shall also reimburse the Applicant with their application and hearing fees at a total of **£341**. This sum is also to be paid within 28 days of this decision being issued.

## Background

2. The Application for a Rent Repayment was brought by the Applicants who are the former tenants of 124 Russell Avenue, London, N22, 6PS ("The premises"). The Respondent was the landlord of the premises.

3. The Applicants occupied the premises as assured shorthold tenants protected under the Housing Act 1988. They resided there for various periods:

    - Joseph Griffin lived at the Property from 17th December 2022 until 29th December 2024.
    - George Smillie lived at the Property from 18th December 2022 until 29th December 2024.
    - Michael Donaldson lived at the Property from 18th December 2022. Taylor de Vos replaced Michael Donaldson and lived at the Property from 17th December 2023 until 29th December 2024.

4. The premises is a three-bedroom, two-storey terraced house with a shared kitchen and bathrooms.
5. The premises are located in the London Borough of Haringey. Haringey operated additional licensing schemes. The first additional licensing scheme came into force on 27 May 2019 and ceased to have effect on 26 May 2024 ( The first scheme). The first scheme was implemented borough-wide. Following the expiry of the first scheme a replacement scheme was introduced. The second scheme continued under the same or similar conditions as the previous scheme, coming into force on 17 June 2024 and shall cease to have effect on 16 June 2029. The second scheme has been implemented borough-wide . It is common ground that the premises met all the criteria under the licensing schemes and should have been licensed.

## *The Applicant's case*

6. The Applicants were represented by Justice for Tenants.

7. The Applicant's case is that during the relevant period (7/07/2023 - 26/08/2024). the premises should have been licensed under both of the licensing schemes although there was a gap between the two schemes of 21 days. They claim back the rent paid for this period of £24866.

8. The Applicants do not receive Universal Credit and they paid for the services so no deductions are required.

9. The Applicants said as well as the licensing breach there was some disrepair. Three weeks after moving in, the Applicants faced an issue with the downstairs bathroom. the toilet began backing up with wastewater. Despite notifying the Respondent immediately, the problem persisted for several months. The workman sent to fix the issue used a high-strength chemical that eventually corroded the pipe. The blockage lasted five to six months. During this time, the Applicants had to endure a constant sewage odour and waste rising into the bath, which attracted clouds of flies. When the floorboards were finally lifted, thousands of flies emerged. Joseph Griffin experienced nausea, vomiting, and headaches, which his doctor associated with irritable IBS. The Applicant believes these symptoms were likely caused by exposure to raw sewage in his living environment. There were also problems with leaks and fire safety because the back door would not open.

***The Respondents' case***

10. The Respondent admitted that the property was unlicensed during the relevant period. He let the Property via letting agents, Barnard Marcus. He says he became aware of the First Scheme in December 2022 and instructed the Letting Agents to apply for a licence on his behalf, which he thought had been done. The Respondent later discovered at some time in or around December 2023 and January 2024 that the Property was not licensed and he applied promptly for a licence. He says he applied for a selective license instead of an additional license and therefore the property remained subject to an RRO. In or around the second week of August 2025 the Respondent discovered that the additional license was required and obtained one on 28th August 2025. In relation to the disrepair the Respondent blamed the Applicants for flushing cat litter down the toilet. He also said the Applicants were tricky and refused access. He blamed the Applicants for breaking the washing machine. He said he was let down by his agents.

**The law**

***The law on Rent Repayment Orders***

The Housing Act 2004 (“the 2004 Act”)

11. The 2004 Act introduced a new system of assessing housing conditions and enforcing housing standards. Part 2 of the Act relates to the licencing of Houses in Multiple Occupation ("HMOs"). S.56 of the Act allows the designation of Additional Licensing Areas. The Act creates offences under section 72(1) of having control and management of an unlicenced HMO and under section 95(1) of having control or management of an unlicenced house. On summary conviction, a person who commits an offence is liable to a fine. An additional remedy was that either a local housing authority ("LHA") or an occupier could apply to a FTT for a RRO.

12. Section 263 of the 2004 Act provides:

“(1) In this Act “person having control”, in relation to premises, means (unless the context otherwise requires) the person who receives the rack-rent of the

premises (whether on his own account or as agent or trustee of another person), or who would so receive it if the premises were let at a rack-rent.

(2) In subsection (1) “rack-rent” means a rent which is not less than two-thirds of the full net annual value of the premises.

(3) In this Act “person managing” means, in relation to premises, the person who, being an owner or lessee of the premises–

(a) receives (whether directly or through an agent or trustee) rents or other payments from–

(i) in the case of a house in multiple occupation, persons who are in occupation as tenants or licensees of parts of the premises; and

(ii) in the case of a house to which Part 3 applies (see section 79(2)), persons who are in occupation as tenants or licensees of parts of the premises, or of the whole of the premises; or

(b) would so receive those rents or other payments but for having entered into an arrangement (whether in pursuance of a court order or otherwise) with

another person who is not an owner or lessee of the premises by virtue of which that other person receives the rents or other payments;

and includes, where those rents or other payments are received through another person as agent or trustee, that other person."

***The Housing and Planning Act 2016 ("the 2016 Act")***

(The amendments made by the Renters Rights Act 2025 do not affect this decision)

13. Part 2 of the 2016 Act introduced a raft of new measures to deal with "rogue landlords and property agents in England". Chapter 2 allows a banning order to be made against a landlord who has been convicted of a banning order offence and Chapter 3 for a data base of rogue landlords and property agents to be established. Section 126 amended the 2004 Act by adding new provisions permitting LHAs to impose Financial Penalties of up to £30,000 for a number of offences as an alternative to prosecution.

14. Chapter 4 introduces a new set of provisions relating to RROs. An additional five offences have been added in respect of which a RRO may now be sought. The maximum award that can be made is the rent paid over a period of 12 months during which the landlord was committing the offence. However, section 46 provides that a tribunal must make the maximum award in specified circumstances. Further, the phrase "such amount as the tribunal considers reasonable in the circumstances" which had appeared in section 74(5) of the 2004 Act, does not appear in the new provisions. It has therefore been accepted that the case law relating to the assessment of a RRO under the 2004 Act is no longer relevant to the 2016 Act.

15. In the Upper Tribunal (reported at [2012] UKUT 298 (LC)), Martin Rodger KC, the Deputy President, had considered the policy of Part 2 of the 2016. He noted (at [64]) that "the policy of the whole of Part 2 of the 2016 Act is clearly to deter the commission of housing offences and to discourage the activities of "rogue landlords" in the residential sector by the imposition of stringent penalties. Despite its irregular status, an unlicensed HMO may be a perfectly satisfactory place to live. The "main object of the provisions is deterrence rather than compensation."

16. Section 40 provides (emphasis added):

"(1) This Chapter confers power on the First-Tier Tribunal to make a rent repayment order where a landlord has committed an offence to which this Chapter applies.

(2) A rent repayment order is an order requiring the landlord under a tenancy of housing in England to—

(a) repay an amount of rent paid by a tenant, or

(b) pay a local housing authority an amount in respect of a relevant award of universal credit paid (to any person) in respect of rent under the tenancy."

17. Section 40(3) lists seven offences "committed by a landlord in relation to housing in England let by that landlord". The five additional offences are: (i) violence for securing entry contrary to section 6(1) of the Criminal Law Act; (ii) eviction or harassment of occupiers contrary to sections 1(2), (3) or (3A) of the Protection from Eviction Act 1977; (iii) failure to comply with an improvement notice contrary to section 30(1) of the 2004 Act; (iv) failure to comply with prohibition order etc contrary to section 32(1) of the Act; and (v) breach of a banning order contrary to section 21 of the 2004 Act. There is a criminal sanction in respect of some of these offences which may result in imprisonment. In other cases, the local housing authority might be expected to take action in the more serious case. However, recognising that the enforcement action taken by local authorities was been too low, the 2016 Act was enacted to provide additional protection for vulnerable tenants against rogue landlords.

18. It is a defence to the section 95(1) offence of having control of or managing an unlicensed house for the person concerned to show that they had a reasonable excuse for doing so (section 95(4)(a), 2004 Act). In this case Mr Newell maintained that he had such a defence in relation to the Flat.

19. In *Marigold v Wells* [2023] UKUT 33 (LC), at [48], borrowing from the approach taken by tax tribunals, the Upper Tribunal suggested that a property tribunal considering a defence of reasonable excuse. They had to first consider objectively if the defence could amount to a reasonable

excuse. Secondly they have to decide if the facts relied on are proven and whether, viewed objectively, the proven facts provided an objectively reasonable excuse for the conduct of the appellant, taking into account their experience and other relevant characteristics.

20. Section 41 deals with applications for RROs. The material parts provide:

> "(1) A tenant or a local housing authority may apply to the First-Tier Tribunal for a rent repayment order against a person who has committed an offence to which this Chapter applies.
>
> (2) A tenant may apply for a rent repayment order only if —
>
> (a) the offence relates to housing that, at the time of the offence, was let to the tenant, and
>
> (b) the offence was committed in the period of 12 months ending with the day on which the application is made.

21. Section 43 provides for the making of RROs:

> "(1) The First-Tier Tribunal may make a rent repayment order if satisfied, beyond reasonable doubt, that a landlord has committed an offence to which this Chapter applies (whether or not the landlord has been convicted)."

22. Section 44 is concerned with the amount payable under a RRO made in favour of tenants. By section 44(2) that amount "must relate to rent paid during the period mentioned" in a table which then follows. The table provides for repayment of rent paid by the tenant in respect of a maximum period of 12 months. Section 44(3) provides (emphasis added):

> > "(3) The amount that the landlord may be required to repay in respect of a period must not exceed—
> >
> > (a) the rent paid in respect of that period, less
> >
> > (b) any relevant award of universal credit paid (to any person) in respect of rent under the tenancy during that period.

23. Section 44(4) provides:

"(4) In determining the amount the tribunal must, in particular, take into account—

(a) the conduct of the landlord and the tenant,

(b) the financial circumstances of the landlord, and

(c) whether the landlord has at any time been convicted of an offence to which this Chapter applies."

24. Section 46 specifies a number of situations in which a FTT is required, subject to exceptional circumstances, to make a RRO in the maximum sum. These relate to the five additional offences which have been added by the 2016 Act where the landlord has been convicted of the offence or where the LHA has imposed a Financial Penalty.

25. In Williams v Parmar [2021] UKUT 244 (LC); [2022] HLR 8, the Chamber President, Fancourt J, gave guidance on the approach that should be adopted by FTTs in applying section 44:

(i) A RRO is not limited to the amount of the profit derived by the unlawful activity during the period in question (at [26]);

(ii) Whilst a FTT may make an award of the maximum amount, there is no presumption that it should do so (at [40]);

(iii) The factors that a FTT may take into account are not limited by those mentioned in section 44(4), though these are the main factors which are likely to be relevant in the majority of cases (at [40]).

(iv) A FTT may in an appropriate case order a sum lower than the maximum sum, if what the landlord did or failed to do in committing the offence is relatively low in the scale of seriousness ([41]).

(v) In determining the reduction that should be made, a FTT should have regard to the "purposes intended to be served by the jurisdiction to make a RRO" (at [41] and [43]).

26. The Deputy Chamber President, Martin Rodger KC, has subsequently given guidance of the level of award in his decisions Simpson House 3 Ltd v Osserman [2022] UKUT 164 (LC); [2022] HLR 37 and Hallett v Parker

[2022] UKUT 165 (LC); [2022] HLR 46. Thus, a FTT should distinguish between the professional "rogue" landlord, against whom a RRO should be made at the higher end of the scale (80%) and the landlord whose failure was to take sufficient steps to inform himself of the regulatory requirements (the lower end of the scale being 25%).

27. In Acheampong v Roman [2022] HLR 44, Judge Cooke has now stated that FTTs should adopt the following approach:

*"20. The following approach will ensure consistency with the authorities:*

*a. Ascertain the whole of the rent for the relevant period;*

*b. Subtract any element of that sum that represents payment for utilities that only benefited the tenant, for example gas, electricity and internet access. It is for the landlord to supply evidence of these, but if precise figures are not available an experienced tribunal will be able to make an informed estimate.*

*c. Consider how serious this offence was, both compared to other types of offence in respect of which a rent repayment order may be made (and whose relative seriousness can be seen from the relevant maximum sentences on conviction) and compared to other examples of the same type of offence. What proportion of the rent (after deduction as above) is a fair reflection of the seriousness of this offence? That figure is then the starting point (in the sense that that term is used in criminal sentencing); it is the default penalty in the absence of any other factors but it may be higher or lower in light of the final step:*

*d. Consider whether any deduction from, or addition to, that figure should be made in the light of the other factors set out in section 44(4).*

*21. I would add that step (c) above is part of what is required under section 44(4)(a). It is an assessment of the conduct of the landlord specifically in the context of the offence itself; how badly has this landlord behaved in committing the offence? I have set it out as a separate step because it is the matter that has most frequently been overlooked."*

28. Licensing offences may be 'less serious' than other offences for which an RRO can be recovered. However, in *Daff v Gyalui* [2023] UKUT 134 (LC) [49] it was stated that there are "more or less serious examples" of Section 72 offences.

29. *Newell v Abbott* [2024] UKUT 181 (LC) at [47]-[57] provides a comprehensive summary of the Upper Tribunal's recent decisions regarding the seriousness of particular licensing offences.

30. *Newell* also provides a 'neutral' baseline for assessing the seriousness of an RRO. Deputy Chamber President Martin Rodger KC assessed that case at 60% without putting weight on either party's conduct.

**Determination**

31. We are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the Respondent was the Applicants' landlord during the relevant periods. We are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the premises were within Additional Licensing Areas and should have been licensed for the relevant period minus 21 days but were not.

32. We are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the Respondent was the person in control of the premises. We are also satisfied that the Applicants paid the rent they alleged during the relevant periods.

33. We are not satisfied that the Respondent had a reasonable excuse during the relevant period. It was his responsibility to ensure the right license was in place. He cannot pass responsibility onto his agents.

34. Accordingly, we consider that the offence is established for the period claimed. No license was obtained or even sought during the relevant period.

35. Having decided that the offence is made out we consider it is appropriate to make a Rent Repayment order in this case. We will then consider the amount of penalty that is due. Applying the test in *Acheampong* (above):
    - The whole of the rent due is shown above as £24866.
    - In relation to utilities there are no deductions that need to be made.
    - The Applicants did not receive universal credit so there is no deduction required here.
    - We consider that this offence was moderately serious and we accept that there was some mitigation. We also do not consider that the Respondent was a professional landlord Nonetheless it was his responsibility to keep himself informed as to his licensing responsibilities. He failed in this regard during the relevant periods.

- In terms of conduct we do consider that there was some serious disrepair and this is an aggravating factor.

36. In terms of the financial circumstances of the landlord, he raised issues about his income. He said he is a pensioner and he is not a professional landlord. We accept this but he needs to learn that it is not appropriate to operate outside the licensing system. He seeks to argue that he was a good landlord. We don't accept this. The Applicants suffered considerably as a result of the poor drainage which the landlord sought to blame on them unjustly.

37. Taking all of these matters into account we consider that an award of 60% of the rent for the relevant period is appropriate . This amounts to **£16162.90.** This sum should be paid within 28 days.

38. The Applicants were successful in their application therefore we also require the Respondents to pay their application and hearing fees which total **£341**.This sum should also be paid within 28 days of receipt of the decision.

**Judge Shepherd**

**8th October 2026**

RIGHTS OF APPEAL

1. If a party wishes to appeal this decision to the Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber) then a written application for permission must be made to the

First-Tier Tribunal at the Regional office which has been dealing with the case.

2. The application for permission to appeal must arrive at the Regional office within 28 days after the Tribunal sends written reasons for the decision to the person making the application.

3. If the application is not made within the 28 day time limit, such application must include a request for an extension of time and the reason for not complying with the 28 day time limit; the Tribunal will then look at such reason(s) and decide whether to

allow the application for permission to appeal to proceed despite not being within the time limit.

4. The application for permission to appeal must identify the decision of the Tribunal to which it relates (i.e. give the date, the property and the case number), state the grounds of appeal and state the result the party making the application is seeking.