

A former head of leadership at NHS England has been jailed for nearly five years after being convicted of fraud offences.

8 JANUARY 2016 BY LAWRENCE DUNHILL FOR HSJ

- **Neil Wood was part of a group convicted of unlawfully taking £3.5m from NHS England and two trusts**
- **Case revolved around payments made for training videos featuring his wife**
- **Wood was a senior manager at LYPFT until March 2013, and also worked with Leeds Community Healthcare before moving to NHS England**
- **He was arrested in June 2014, after police were alerted by HMRC**

Neil Wood, 41, was part of a group of people convicted of unlawfully taking £3.5m from NHS England, Leeds and York Partnership Foundation Trust and Leeds Community Healthcare Trust over a number of years.

The case, which concluded at Leeds Crown Court on Friday, revolved around payments made for training videos featuring his wife.

NHS Protect, which supported the case against Wood, said he had awarded numerous training contracts to a company called The Learning Grove, which was run by his friend.

Over a seven year period to June 2014, £1.8m was transferred from The Learning Grove to LW Learning, a company registered in his wife's name.

The investigation revealed messages between Wood and his friend in which they discussed transferring money between accounts and what they could charge the NHS for, including sporting events, trips to London and dinners in expensive restaurants, NHS Protect said.

Further money was authorised to The Learning Grove when Wood moved to NHS England in April 2013, while LW Learning received further payments via a Canadian company and an associate of Wood's.

He was a senior manager at LYPFT until March 2013, and also worked with Leeds Community Healthcare before moving to NHS England. He was arrested in June 2014, after police were alerted by HM Revenue and Customs.

He pleaded guilty to two counts of conspiracy to commit fraud by abuse of position, and one count of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation. He has been sentenced to four years and eight months' imprisonment.

Wood's wife has been given a suspended sentence for money laundering, while his friend and associate were also jailed.

Simon Higginbotham, specialist fraud lawyer at the Crown Prosecution Service, said: "Neil Wood used his position to siphon off millions of pounds from the NHS for his own benefit. He outsourced services which could have been undertaken in-house so that his wife, friends and contacts received vast sums of money they were not entitled to."

At NHS England, Wood was paid at band 8C, but a spokeswoman previously told *HSJ* that he had no line management responsibility and was not a direct budget holder.

She added that as a "head of service" his role was a standalone post, and was based within the former HR and organisational development directorate, which was subsequently absorbed into the transformation and corporate operations directorate. He worked for NHS England from April 2013 to June 2014, when he was suspended.

The role has been removed as part of restructuring.