

Gang fleeced public bodies of millions

An audacious criminal conspiracy that defrauded NHS hospitals, councils and the Guernsey government out of £12.6 million and funnelled cash overseas has been broken by police.

The network obtained money from 22 mostly public bodies and diverted it to international accounts and legitimate businesses. Sentencing ten people at Leicester crown court, Judge Philip Head said that the operation was "sophisticated and widespread" and could have resulted in £20 million in losses.

Organisations were fooled with forged letters purporting to be from legitimate building companies already carrying out work for the public bodies. The fraudsters took advantage of the fact that public sector contracts were freely available to see under transparency rules.

The conspirators would write, either by email or fax, claiming to have changed their companies' banking details, and supply instead an account controlled by the criminals.

After a Lincoln-based hospital raised the alarm, detectives from Lincolnshire police found a "seamless process" of international fraud and money laundering.

The "prime mover", identified in court as Bayo Awonorin, from Nigeria, was still at large, having failed to answer bail. His "trusted lieutenant" Stephen Tyndale, 47, of Southwark, London, was jailed for ten years. Asif Habib, 53, of Dubai, Imtiaz Khoda, 44, of Lancaster, Abdul Naeem, 36, of Redditch, Worcestershire, and his brother Mohammed Nadeem, 33, also of Redditch, were jailed for up to five and a half years.

Four others were given suspended sentences while Tariq Khan, 35, from Ilford, Essex, was jailed for eight months.

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