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NEWS RELEASE

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Title: Successful prosecution following fire investigation

An investigation by officers at the London Fire Brigade has resulted in the successful prosecution of the owners of a nursing home in Barnet following a fire in May 2005.

Park Care Homes Limited, who owned and operated Ravenscroft Park Nursing Home in Barnet were fined £200,000 at Harrow Crown Court on Friday 16 February for contraventions of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

When fire crews arrived at the incident they found smoke coming from the first floor windows of the three storey building. Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus discovered the fire in the basement and managed to stop it from spreading to other floors, but heavy smoke had spread throughout the entire property.

During the hearing the court were presented with statements from firefighters who attended the incident describing their actions and the difficulties they faced in evacuating people due to locked doors and smoke logged hallways. Fifty six people including twelve members of staff had been in the premises when the fire started.

The Defendants had pleaded guilty to 13 Summonses. However, the Judge was of the opinion that the first two offences that 'The risk assessment was not suitable or sufficient' and that 'Appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious imminent danger to persons at work at Ravenscroft Park Nursing Home were not established' adequately demonstrated the seriousness of the offences and effectively comprised within them all the elements of the other 11 offences.

Barnet Borough Commander Nick O'Reilly said: "This prosecution comes as a timely reminder of the importance of having both a suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment and Emergency Plan at the introduction of the new Fire Safety Order 2005. The new order put the duty of fire safety squarely on the shoulders of the responsible person and this judgement indicates the consequence of getting it wrong.

"Nine people were rescued by fire crews following the smoke logging of the building caused by fire safety contraventions. Although there were no serious injuries 14 residents were taken to hospital for check-ups. A suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment and Emergency Plan might not have prevented the fire but as the Judge agreed it would have reduced the effects of the fire causing less risk to both the occupants and the fire crews.

"I would like to thank all of the officers and personnel who made this prosecution successful, and remind those responsible for properties of the need to carry out a full and comprehensive risk assessment and emergency plan."

Note to Editors:

The Defendants pleaded guilty to 13 Summonses on 21 November 2006 and the

matter was transferred to Harrow Crown Court for sentencing. The Summonses dealt with the following contraventions under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997:

- 1.The risk assessment was not suitable or sufficient;
- 2.Appropriate procedures to be followed in the event of serious imminent danger to persons at work at Ravenscroft Park Nursing Home were not established;
- 3.The door to room 212 was locked with the resident inside;
- 4.The rear and final fire exit (the full height iron gates) from the basement was secured with a combination padlock;
- 5.The fire extinguisher found on the second floor did not have a pin or security tag and the test label was damaged;
- 6.The fire extinguisher found outside room 202 on the first floor was tested on 15 October 2003 and did not have security tag;
- 7.By virtue of the fact that the basement double doors had been wedged open prior to the fire, large volumes of smoke entered the basement corridor compromising escape from all parts of the basement;
- 8.The fire door leading to the laundry in the basement did not have a self closing device;
- 9.The smoke damper at the base of the laundry chute doors in the basement was defective and wedged open;
- 10.The corridor in the basement was being used for storage and thereby restricted the width of the escape route from the basement.
- 11.The final exit door from the kitchen was not maintained in an efficient state, in efficient working order and in good repair in that the bolts securing the door were difficult to open;
- 12.The door leading to the kitchen was locked with a digital lock;
- 13.The only exit from the garden was via a gate that was locked.

On 16 February 2007, the Crown Court handed down the following Judgment:

- 1.In relation to Summons 1 the Defendant is to pay the amount of £100,000.00;
- 2.In relation to Summons 2 the Defendant is to pay the amount of £100,000.00;
- 3.No orders in relation to Summonses 3 – 13;
- 4.Defendant to pay the Prosecutions costs of £30,366.28;
- 5.All money's to be paid within 28 days.