

Journal reporter Melanie Mingas looks into the demise of this once well-respected man

For better and for worse: The many faces of shamed Frank McGrath



His story is that of a career criminal; the former council leader who became the "respectable face" of a multi million pound drug enterprise. His "easy money" business deals lead to his associates being jailed and two police investigations.

This week, 59-year-old Francis McGrath was sentenced to four and half years for his part in a massive money laundering operation.

Handing down the sentence, Judge Robert Atherton said: "You deceived those who you did business with and you deceived people who trusted you."

Details from the five week trial uncovered a tangled web of fraudulent transactions and smuggling operations, financed by Frank McGrath.

One former associate said: "The extent of his fraud and

the way he portrayed himself was unbelievable and the way he wriggled out of the first investigation. I've spoken to the people he cheated out of millions and we think he's a sociopath. Anything less than 10 years must be impossible."

Locals are equally unimpressed, with one blogging: "Every piece of paper McGrath touched while in office and every decision he made

should now be scrutinised carefully, by people with no connection to his period in office. The public deserves to know."

McGrath's first taste of the high life came in 1987, when he first became a millionaire via personal investment in Red Rose radio, owned by his friend Owen Oyston.

After serving on the council for 19 years, he began work as a self employed "business consultant and sole trader", offering money management services to people he met through other business associates, for a 15 per cent return.

Each of McGrath's 88 registered clients employed him for a different reason; tax, debt negotiation and even property sales on their behalf.

He told the court he "helped people out of a tight spot" but his dealings also left many out of pocket.

Before the web began to unravel, he "helped" some big names. Amongst them

John Rigby, formerly of Park Hall Leisure, proprietors of Camelot theme park, and Eric Grove, 35th richest man in the UK.

Then he met Silvano Turchet. Originally from Italy, he was serving a three year sentence for car ringing. But the qualified pilot would soon begin flying his own plane to Belgium to collect million pound hauls of Class A drugs.

The pair met while Turchet was on day release from Kirkham Prison. After paying off Turchet's court costs, McGrath then began "loaning" him money, eventually totalling more than £300,000.

In a bugged conversation, Turchet claimed to be making

importantly McGrath bought the hangar in Sleaf where Turchet kept his plane.

Turchet is currently three years into a 15 year sentence after two hauls of Class A drugs were discovered by police. The first included the largest ever seizure of Ecstasy at the time.

It is not the first time McGrath has faced prosecution. In 1991, Lancashire Police launched the £25m Operation

Angel; investigating allegations of corruption at the council which centred on McGrath and

Judge Atherton described McGrath as "a deceitful man"

the docklands regeneration. The then Attorney General decided not to press charges but McGrath did leave the council.

Documents from the investigation state: "the Town Hall was rife with rumours that Mr McGrath had received £125,000 from Balfour Beatty while a councillor."

During the trial, his son and wife both provided character statements. Mrs McGrath, head teacher of Our Lady at St. Edward's school in Fulwood, vowed to "stand by her husband".

McGrath was known to the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). After a string of deals went sour, former client Tim Proffitt recorded 11 hours worth of phone calls. But the calls were incomplete and not in themselves enough to form a case.

Mr Proffitt, a former mink farmer, first approached McGrath for help applying for compensation from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

(DEFRA) and settling a business debt of £130,000. McGrath claimed to have settled the debt for only £92,000 but the debtors were claiming not to have received it.

Mr Proffitt was then offered several opportunities to recover his money, including the purchase of £13,000 worth of kitchen units and a £150,000 stone crushing machine, for only £13,000.

Then he paid £45,000 for a property in Ashton, supposedly in receivership. When visiting the property without McGrath he saw a man inside and discovered the

house was not only occupied but the owner had no knowledge of a sale, receivership or even McGrath.

Mr Proffitt received his payment from DEFRA but was still left out of pocket. A few of McGrath's former associates, including Mr Grove, managed to recover some money, but many others didn't and law suits are pending.

In evidence, McGrath claimed to have himself been framed, but the jury disagreed.

With various suits still to progress through the courts, it is likely the public will learn even more about the bizarre and shocking dealings of what Judge Atherton described as "a deceitful man".



Should McGrath's wife be asked to step down from her headteachers' post?
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£120,000 a week; equivalent to the wages of a Premier League footballer. The prosecution referred to him as "ostentatiously wealthy".

But he couldn't use any of the money. At the time Turchet was raking in millions and flying to Belgium, McGrath was "loaning" him huge sums. Money he initially claimed was a gift, and later a "bad debt".

The money was funded assets; a £116,000 house; a property in Italy, for which McGrath made payments totalling €175,000 and a £100 per month mobile phone contract.

He also financed a £17,000 watch and provided a number of blank cheques. But most



McGrath paid Silvano Turchet (pictured) court costs and loaned him money

Picture: LEP

Thousands of civil servants to strike over redundancy packages

By Laura Wild
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THOUSANDS of civil servants from Preston will go on strike for two days next week over plans to slash redundancy payments.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) has called a 48-hour strike on Monday and Tuesday.

Workers at job centres, tax

offices, courts, passport offices, coastguard stations and driving test centres are among those taking part in the strike.

The union is expecting strong support with 4,000 members in Preston.

PCS North West regional chair Lawrence Dunne said: "This region relies heavily on public sector jobs and all the indications from today's meeting are that the strike will be rock solid in the North West.

"Attempts in the last few days by employers to undermine support for the union have spectacularly backfired."

The government is looking to save £500 million through the changes, based on the number of jobs it has axed over the last three years.

With all the main political parties planning deep spending cuts, the union fears that the cuts to the scheme will lead to tens of thousands of job losses on the cheap.



The last strike of this sort took place in London in 2008

Picture: The Guardian