

# Huge rise in sexual and violent crimes against over 60s

Policing Board member questions why so few attacks against the elderly have been brought before courts

By Gillian Halliday

OLDER people were the victims of almost 2,000 sexual and violent crimes in Northern Ireland in just one year, shocking figures reveal.

According to PSNI statistics, 1,940 offences were recorded against those aged over 60 in the 12 months to March 2019.

That was a jump of 230 on the previous financial year, when 1,710 crimes were recorded in the same category.

The PSNI said it is “committed” to reducing offences and bringing offenders to court.

But DUP MLA Mervyn Storey said the statistics are “truly shocking”, and the crimes are simply “not acceptable”.

“Older people play a vital and vibrant role in families and communities right across Northern Ireland,” he said. “They have the right to feel safe in our society.”

“Behind each of these offences is an older person who has suffered unjustifiable physical and psychological harm from being brutally attacked or harassed. In 2020 in Northern Ireland this is simply not acceptable.”

Mr Storey, a Policing Board member, said “serious questions” need to be asked of the PSNI and the wider justice system on how

other crimes such as burglary have “steadily declined” in recent years, while offences against older people have “continued to rise”.

He said that, of the 1,940 crimes in 2018/19, a suspect was identified in “only 10% of these cases” while a third of victims did not “support police action”.

“We have to wonder why this can be the case,” Mr Storey added.

“It is wrong that victims aged over 60 do not have confidence in the PSNI and courts to iden-



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tify their attackers and put them behind bars.”

Last year research by the charity Action on Elder Abuse Northern Ireland showed that 12% of crimes against those aged 65 or over have been ‘solved’ by the PSNI. For the wider population, the figure is 17.5%.

Mr Storey said there must be a change in approach.

“We need to see a victim-centred approach to these investigations. Moving forward the PSNI

and Department of Justice must finally get tough with these criminals who prey on the most vulnerable,” he added.

“There should be a clear message – both in terms of policing activity and sentences handed down – that if you attack or harass an older person you will be held accountable and go to prison for a very long time.”

In response, Chief Superintendent Simon Walls said: “One crime is one crime too many and we, as a police service, understand the impact these crimes have on victims. We understand that when someone is a victim of crime, particularly people who may be vulnerable, the fear that that creates. However, I want to reassure victims we are committed to bringing the perpetrators before the courts.”

He added: “Our officers work hard every day to make our communities safe and to ensure people do all they can to stay safe in their homes. We have been, and we continue to work closely with statutory and voluntary agencies, to ensure victims get the help and support they need.”

“We are committed to doing everything we can to prevent and reduce the number of crimes against all members of our communities.”

